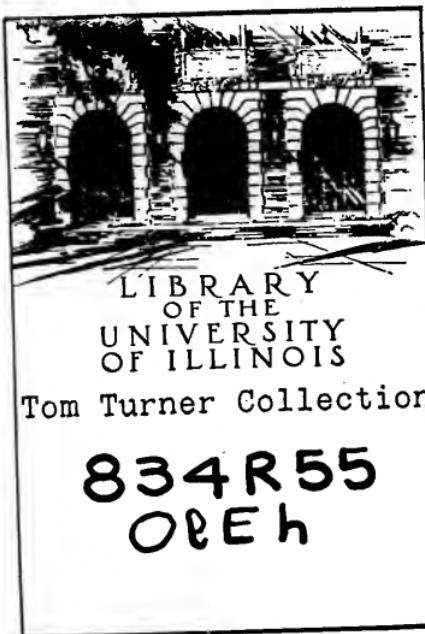


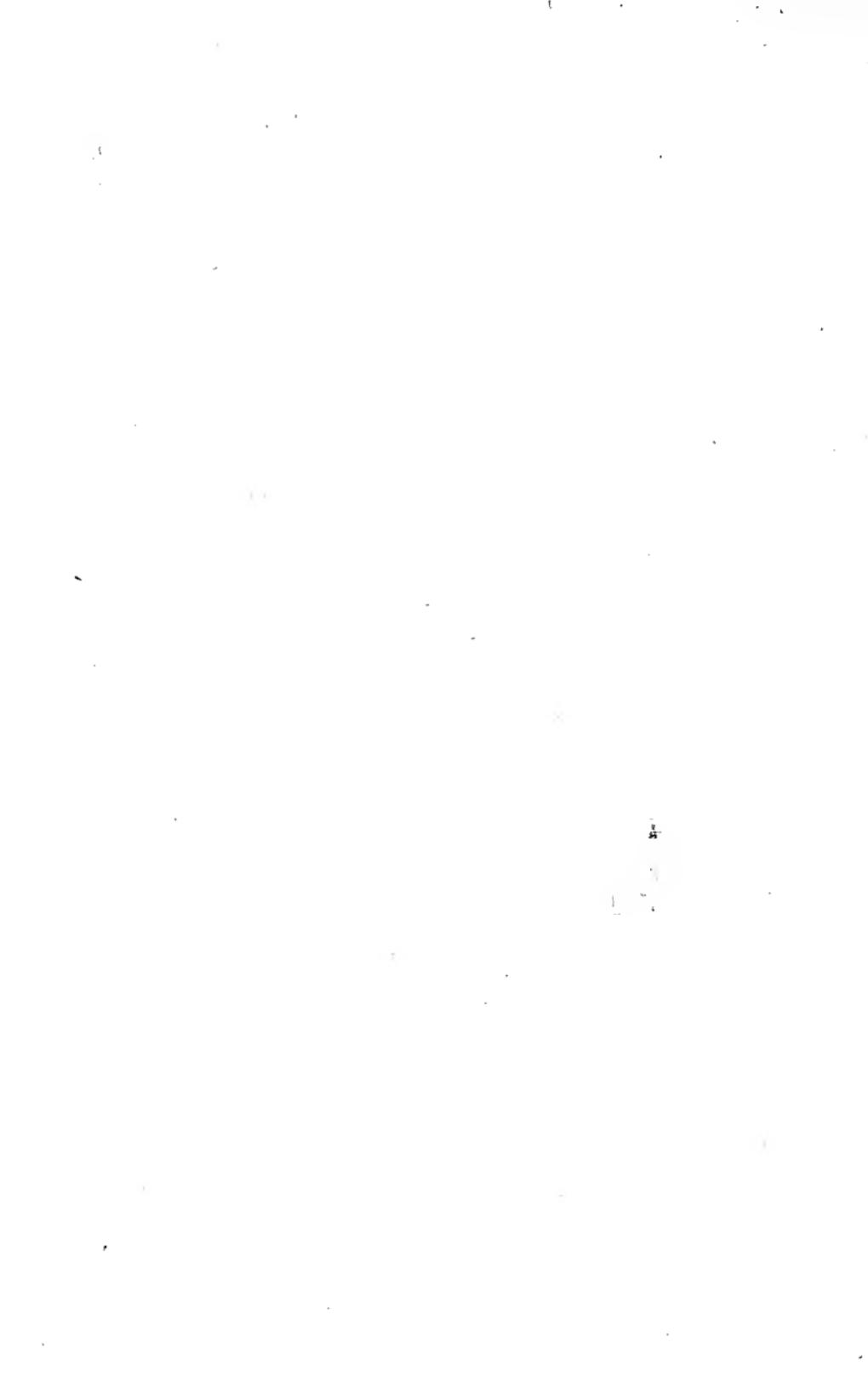
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LOU,

VON · ROBERTS







L O U

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LOU

BY

BARON VON ROBERTS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

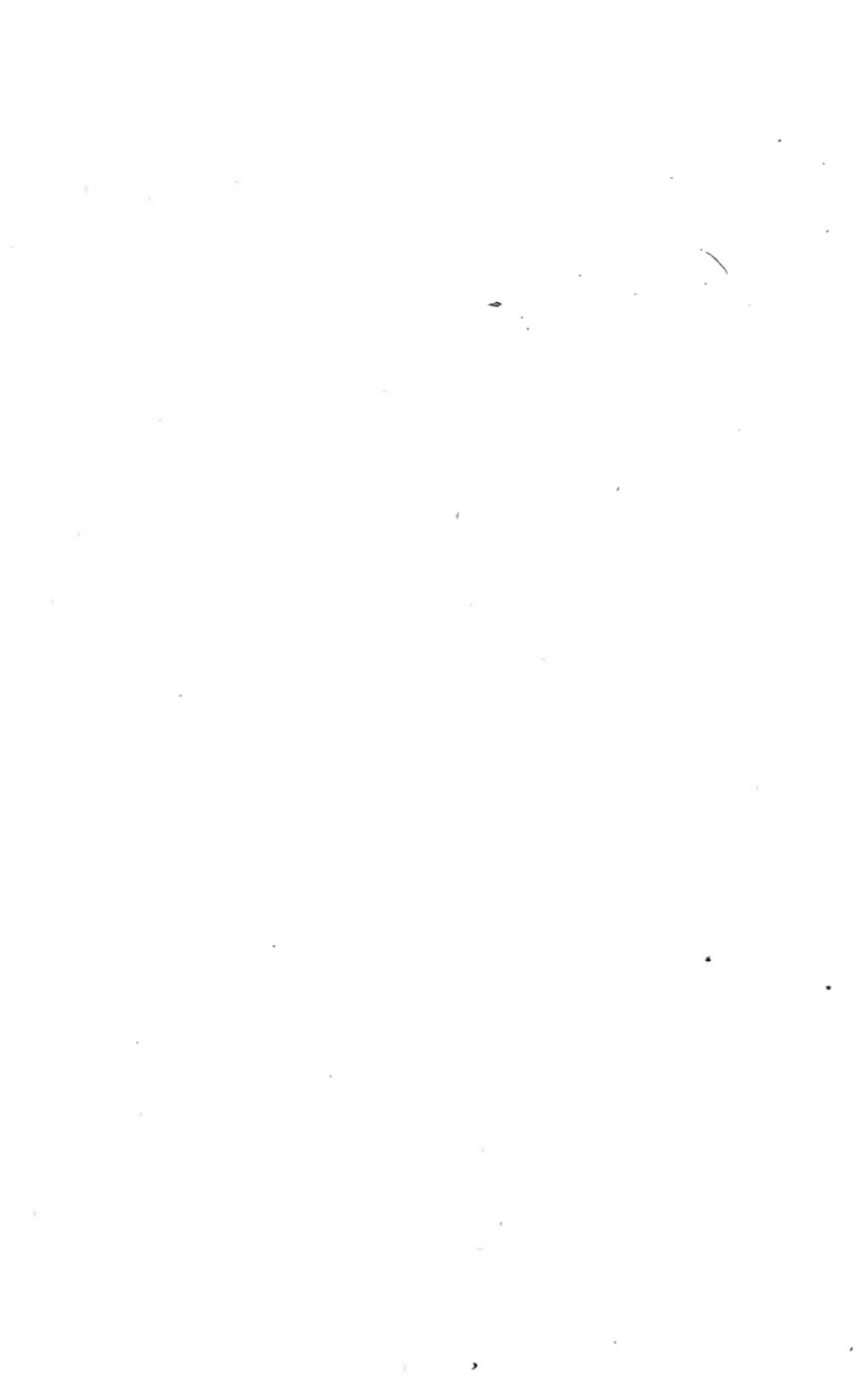
JESSIE HAYNES



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

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Ol E h

INTRODUCTION

THE author of *Lou*, though not a young man, is young as an author. He is not yet known throughout Europe, like a Björnson or a Valera. The makers of dictionaries have not yet discovered him, and for most of the particulars which I am able to give I am indebted to his own good-nature. Baron von Roberts has obliged me with a short autobiographical sketch, and from it I borrow those facts the knowledge of which seems likely to increase our interest in reading his touching and curious novel.

Alexander von Roberts was born on the 23rd of August 1845 at Luxemburg. He is of English parentage, for his great-grandfather, the first Baron, was our Consul-General in Dantzig, who settled in Pomerania, and was ennobled by Frederick the Great. His mother's family is French, and Baron von Roberts is another instance of the frequency with which talent is displayed by men of mixed

race. He was educated at Luxemburg and in Paris, where he lived till he was called to Coblenz, to enter the Prussian army, in 1864. His dream from childhood had been to become a soldier by profession, and it was a deep disappointment to him to arrive just too late to take part in the war against Denmark.

His baptism of blood, however, came soon enough. In his twenty-first year he fought through the Bohemian campaign, and saw active service in the battle of Sadowa. When peace was proclaimed with Austria, von Roberts proceeded to Berlin, and from 1867 to 1869 was immersed in his studies at the Military Academy of that city. He left it to take part in the Franco-German war, and stayed in France until July 1871, when he proceeded to Cologne, where he was an officer in the garrison for about three years. Arrived at the age of thirty, and determined to make soldiering the interest of his life, he thought it well to see the world before settling down to the routine of his profession. In 1874 and 1875 he was travelling widely in Italy and the East, and residing in Rome. A volume of *Türkische Interna* ("Turkish Interiors") resulted from this *wanderjahr*. Returning at length to Germany, Baron von Roberts became professor at

the War School at Erfurt, and for many years was occupied with purely military studies.

A chance led him, in mature life, to imaginative writing. In 1882 a Vienna newspaper offered a prize for the best short story, to be published in its *feuilleton*. Baron von Roberts was persuaded to compete, and sent in the tale called *Es* ("It") which has since been so widely read. It not only received the prize, but produced a considerable sensation. The lucky author was pestered with requests to pursue the same original and telling vein; and he allowed himself to be persuaded into doing so. His short stories soon obtained a very wide vogue. He collected them in successive volumes: *Es und Anderes* ("It and other Tales"), 1882; *Die Pensionärin* ("The Female Pensioner"), 1884; *Unmusikalisch und Anderes* ("Unmusical and other Tales"), 1886; and *Satisfaction und Anderes* ("Satisfaction and other Tales"). He was called the creator of the German short story.

Baron von Roberts was past forty before he ventured upon a work of any magnitude. His first novel, *Lou*, which is here given to the English public, was written for *Die Neue Freie Presse* in 1886. It has been followed by *Um den Namen*, ("For the Name's Sake") 1887; *Revanche*, 1889; and *Preisgekrönt* ("Awarded the Prize"),

1890. As soon as his literary work began to be popular, Baron von Roberts quitted his professorial chair at Erfurt, and having married in 1886, settled, after many wanderings in the South of Europe, in Berlin, where he now resides. He is at this moment one of the most active and most popular of the novelists of Germany.

EDMUND GOSSE.

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L O U

CHAPTER I.

THE LASH OF CAIRO.

THE air struck close and heavy as Lou opened the doors of his master's rooms that morning. And what was this peculiar faint odour—partly of cigar smoke from the night before, partly of the fumes of the dying lamp, and partly—something else?

Lou, whose scent is keen as a bloodhound's, sniffs in vain to discover what that something can be. Surely not powder?

The heavy window curtains were closed; a golden brown twilight enveloped everything, except where one curtain was cleft by a straight white line of light.

With his bare feet, noiselessly as a cat, his unusually small head stretched forward as if on

the scent, Lou crept towards this line of light. As he threw the curtains wide and his eyes became accustomed to the blinding flood of light which streamed in, he noticed a small, flat, blue-grey cloud float slowly away from the door leading into the Marquis's bedroom. The cloud fluttered and vanished with the movement of the curtain.

Lou listened. The door stood half open, but there was no sound from the other side; even Zeppa's wise nose and sharply alert eyes, which usually appeared from behind the *portière*, were missing to-day.

Something must be wrong!

Hesitating—very cautiously, for fear of waking his master—Lou opened the tall windows. Ah—what a delicious rush of air and light! Paris lay stretched out under the chaste luminous mist of an early spring morning, the whole vast horizon outlined in jagged waves of houses—Paris, nothing but Paris, as far as the eye could reach. Close by, the pale slate-blue gables glittering wet with night dew, then a sea of piled-up, interlaced roofs toned down to an ever fainter blue, and shading off through delicate violet to the glorified rosy haze which overspread the distant parts of the city. The sun, a sharply defined, glowing

white disc, shone with a curious flickering motion through a silver-grey mist, but flashed from the cupola of the Invalides in glittering rays—a foretaste of the glory which was to fill the day.

Paris was beginning to awake. A few carts rattled along with hard metallic thumps—a military march sounded out of the distance, now almost swallowed up by the narrow streets, now clashing out in ringing melody. With shrill cries a huckster offered vegetables, while down in the winter-brown garden, with its sparse sprinkling of green, the sparrows chirped and twittered in unconcerned and noisy chorus.

Lou stood there, lightly drumming his slender, childishly formed fingers on the gilded balustrade in time to the music. His blue-and-white striped shirt was thrown open, disclosing a considerable portion of the dark-brown chest with its coppery gleams. In the hollow of his throat an indigo-blue sign was tattooed, and lower down hung a brightly fringed amulet-bag. The teeth, which might have been cut from two compact blocks of ivory, shone with startling whiteness. It was altogether a handsome Nubian head—almost Caucasian in the refinement of its lines. The dull, slightly woolly hair was densely thick, only permitting of the shortest attempt at a

fashionable parting just above the firmly modelled forehead ; right across one nostril ran the scar of a slashing wound.

How old was Lou ? Nobody knew—himself least of all. The mysterious hieroglyphics on his throat might have afforded some information, if they could have been deciphered ; midway between man and boy—tall and slender, with long sinewy limbs whose movements still retained some of the ungainliness of growth.

Paris ! How Lou loved Paris ! He was no longer afraid of it, as he was in those first days.

Do you remember, Lou, how you arrived four years ago with your master, the Marquis de Breteuilles, at the Gare du Sud ? It was a night in December, and it was raining—rattling down upon the glass roof of the station, driving icy-cold in the faces of those who came out. Dripping—gurgling—gushing—nothing but rain, never-ending rain. As you stood there shuddering with cold, your master had compassion on you and gave you a seat in his carriage. Compassion ? Well, you would not expose a high-bred dog, for which you have just paid a good price to such weather either.

How much had he cost the Marquis ? Lou only knew that his former owner in Cairo had

pocketed a heap of shining coin ; he himself had received as a parting gift a cut of the lash across his back ; with a howl of pain the boy had entered into his new service.

Cairo—at the thought of Cairo he felt again the sting of that slashing stroke—the last of a long succession of biting, snapping, whistling cuts. How often would he not have changed places with one of the little shabby brown donkeys he had to look after ! They at least were allowed to feed and rest when their work was over.

But that is past and done with long ago. Cairo lies far away down there, across the cruel, rocking sea, which nearly shook the soul out of his body in his passage over it. Now all is well —now he would not exchange with any donkey in the whole world—not even the proudest, grandest one of the harem with its embroidered trappings and gold-trimmed head-gear. The Marquis is so kind, and the pretty little riding-whip which, in moments of impatience, he sometimes takes down from the wall, is but a teasing plaything ; it is only used to warn Lou not to be too high-spirited—not to quite forget the lash of Cairo.

Hark ! A whine comes from the next room. It is the dog. But it is not the short, sharp, joyous bark with which the hound is wont to greet

the Nubian. Lou listens with ears and eyes, his nostrils quivering—but an uncanny, long-drawn, slowly expiring cry of woe. Lou springs to his full height !

Something has happened—last night—this moment ! With a few hurried strides he is at the door.

In there too there is a golden gloom, and at first, with all his sharp sight, Lou can distinguish nothing but a tumbled heap on the floor near the table. That was never there before.

A second or two of intensest listening, and then a lightning flash darts from the yellowish white of Lou's eyes. In the sudden shock of terror, he throws the door wide with a jerk that makes it creak and groan upon its hinges for some time afterwards. The light of day shines in upon it all.

“ Moussou ! Moussou !” comes tremulously over Lou's pallid lips.

He tries to call the name aloud, but he seems turned to stone—motionless as a statue ; his head and shoulders stretched forward in an attitude of intense alertness, he stands devouring with starting, terror-stricken eyes the horror before him.

A chair has been pushed back from the table. On the dark red velvet seat lies a white, waxen

face. The head violently thrown back, as if broken from the body—motionless. The reddened lids only partially veil the eyes, gleaming glassily from beneath them. The lips under the slight, gaily twirled moustache are firmly pressed together—perfectly bloodless—with a curious expression half smile, half pain, at the corners.

The body leans against the chair just as it must have been arrested in its heavy fall. One hand hangs limply down, something glittering in it—a pistol! Lou recognises it as the wonderful *chef-d'œuvre* of chased silver which hung by the Marquis's bed. The weapon dangles loosely between two fingers.

The other hand lies across the bared breast, on which the shirt is slightly torn. The hand is a little curved—it had not time to reach the spot it tried to grasp; it stiffened as it clutched. That spot is a small dark hole in the left side—just over the heart—from which two thin black threads trickle down, each congealed further on in a large clot.

And there crouches the great Danish hound, close to his master's corpse. One white paw is laid upon the shot-pierced breast, and with it he is making strange, human, groping movements as if trying to help—as if to awaken the sleeper.

A questioning terror gleams in the wide-open brown eyes. The long dun-coloured tail beats slowly backwards and forwards on the floor with a hollow thud. And now the broad neck is stretched, the long head lifted up, and the jaws quiver as though they would give forth a howl ; but nothing comes but a hoarse choking whine.

"Moussou ! Moussou ! . . ." As if paralysed by fright, Lou sinks down opposite to the dog ; with trembling hands he touches the limbs of the dead.

Something falls. Lou gives a great start ! It was the pistol slipping out of the dead fingers—the sole moving thing about that stiffened form.

And now—surely there was a movement in the waxen face ? It was but the dancing reflection of a window over the way.

Louder and louder grows Lou's despairing cry, "Moussou !" Zeppa's tail strikes ever harder on the floor. At last, in mutual woe, they howl together across that quiet face.

But still no movement—no answer.

Suddenly, as at a given signal, they stop appalled by their own voices, and stare at one another—helpless in their horror : Zeppa seeking comfort of Lou, and Lou seeking comfort of Zeppa.

And now a shuddering dread falls upon Lou—

it is all so strange, so inexplicable. He springs to his feet and darts out, screaming for help.

“Moussou dead ! Moussou dead !” his despairing cry rings through the house.

Very soon the apartment is thronged with people—a whispering, hustling crowd from the *arrière logis* and the surrounding neighbourhood—with inquisitive, almost maliciously delighted faces.

An old gentleman, with a yellow face and snowy white hair, shrugs his one high shoulder from time to time and takes a portentous pinch of snuff. It is the doctor.

They raise the dead man and lay him on the bed ; in doing so something falls to the ground. Lou snatches at it—it is a locket. Something of the greed of his race for glittering things prompts him to conceal the ornament, but something too of intuition, which tells him that this locket was very dear to his master, and that some day it may have the charmed properties of an amulet for him.

While they lay him out in state, the people disperse themselves about the salon ; how thrilling to discover what some one has done, has written or thought in the last hours before he forces open the doors into another world ! With an agreeable

prickling sensation of horror they spy about among the objects on the writing-table.

There in a costly Japanese vase flaunt a few magnificent full-blown tea-roses—an old red-nosed woman cannot resist sniffing at them : have they any fragrance left, or has their breath ceased with the breath of the silent man lying on the bed in there ? Three candles of the candelabra are quite burnt down, a gust of wind must have suddenly extinguished the fourth—maybe, that man's last sigh before he did the deed. Bubbles are still rising in a half-filled champagne glass, but they float upwards slowly like great tears—in keeping with the sombre oppression of the moment.

“Ten minutes past four,” whispers somebody—a *commis*, with a boyish face surmounting a cream-coloured cravat.

In truth, the hands of the gold watch propped against an open box of cartridges, do point to ten minutes past four. Some eyes are turned towards it with as keen an interest as if they were watching the circling spokes of a wheel of fortune : is the watch going or has it stopped ?

“They do say,” observes she of the red nose, “that a person’s watch runs down when he dies—it stops with the last beat of his heart. . . .”

“One simply forgets to wind it up on such an

occasion, Madame Glaure," rejoins the oily voice of Monsieur Floques the barber. "And, indeed, why take the trouble?" The unctuous superior smile of the coffee-house philosopher plays round the wide mouth and smooth shiny face.

A feminine hand is forward enough to lift the little pale brown glove, crushed and crumpled as if in a sudden burst of rage, from the open Elzevir on which it lies.

"He knew how to live—he did," says Monsieur Floques, pointing with his thumb at the glove, and winking one eye expressively.

"Alfred de Musset," lisps a literary lady's-maid, who has deciphered this important item from the title-page. She is enraptured by the discovery.

"He could write verses as well as de Musset," continued Monsieur Floques. "I knew them all—capital verses, I can tell you: I shaved him every day—splendid rhythm!"

"It *has* stopped!" blurts out the *commis*, breaking the whispering stillness. "The watch has stopped!" Having made sure of this he is perfectly happy.

"I knew it," murmurs Madame Glaure with superstitious relish; "such things happen constantly."

At that moment a fat hand, which had long

been watching its opportunity, pushes aside the Elzevir as if by accident, and discloses the letters which lie beneath it. Every eye fails gloatingly upon the addresses.

Now the barber knows—knows everything—the fraction of a glance at the first address makes it clear as daylight to him. Not that he had any intention of looking at this address—oh ! dear no—he is much too discreet ! With an imposing, theatrical wave of the hand, he turns the letter over and covers it with his great bony fist.

“*Allons !* my friends,” he cries, with the indignation of extreme honesty, “we all have our secrets !”

Then after a short pause—“If one might say so ; but—*de mortuis nil ni*—how does it go ? You know, gentlemen, a famous epitaph.”

In the end, however, he cannot keep his secret. Lou listens, trying to gather some meaning from the various hints that filter through the man’s gossip. But he understands nothing ; he only hears an oft-recurring name, and it is a woman’s. Oh, they know all about it—not a heart-beat in the whole affair which bound the Marquis to a certain lady has escaped Monsieur Floques’s penetration.

“For a woman’s sake, then !” exclaims Madame Glaure, thirsting for details.

"My dear lady, that is not uncommon in Paris," answers the barber with a self-satisfied smirk of superior wisdom. "*Que voulez vous?* he wrote verses!"

"It was stronger than he!" burst in the young man with the cream-coloured necktie.

For some woman's sake, then, the Marquis had put the pistol to his heart! Yes—that does occur in Paris: in Cairo nobody would think of killing themselves for a woman.

If Lou had been a grand, high-born "Moussou," he, too, might have killed himself for a woman.

However, that is over long ago. It is a desecration to remember one's own troubles at such a moment. "Poor Moussou!" he sighs, "poor Moussou!"

"Ah, here is our nigger! Well, *mon vieux*, and what does he know about it?" asks Monsieur Floques sharply.

Lou shakes his head. What should he know!

"Did he hear nothing—see nothing—notice nothing? One has eyes and ears like other people although one's skin is black!"

"*Rien!*" says Lou, and it sounds like a heavy sigh. "*Rien!*"

Lou was sleeping stretched out as usual on the white bear-skin in the anteroom. While he

slept, a foot had touched him in passing, no doubt that of his master. In the few moments that followed, between waking and sleeping, he fancied he saw his master's figure through the door, standing at the open window.

There was a bluish shimmer of moonlight in the salon, and white gleams came from the edges of the furniture and from the great leaves of the plants. The silhouette of the Marquis stood out sharply against the silvery sky,—at first standing up straight, then with bowed head, his face buried in his hands. The door creaked softly in the slight breeze. A moan came from the direction of the window, half drowned by the creaking of the door. Suddenly grey gloom swept out all the points of light. Lou shuddered as if with cold. But the form of the Marquis had vanished into the darkness of that passing cloud.

“And there was no shot?—no cry?—no fall?
—no groan?”

“*Rien!*” answered Lou.

How hopeless, unspeakably hopeless, it sounds! Perhaps he might have been able to tell them the little he knew, had he possessed more knowledge of the language. But “*rien*” is all he can bring over his intractable tongue.

Several times during the course of the day he

was asked for information, but could give no other answer. Once it was a little bent lady with trembling silvery curls on her brow, who tottered out of the death chamber on the arm of a tall gentleman; they addressed her as Madame la Marquise. And from the perfumed folds of the lace pocket-handkerchief with which the lady covered her tear-drenched face came the same question. This time his "*rien*" was even less clear and intelligible than before, as if the word, small as it was, stuck in his throat and choked him. The gentleman pressed a gold coin into his hand as they left.

The police, too, failed to get anything out of him. After the furniture had been sealed and an inventory taken of every article, the party chanced upon Lou, and shot short, sharp, rough questions at him. What was his name? —who was he?—where did he come from? —where was he going to? —what did he mean?

“Moussou dead!” stammered Lou.

How idiotic! They knew that—they could see that for themselves!

A little fat man, with long strands of hair glued to the polished surface of his cranium, was apparently at his wits' end. “What are we to do with

him?" he rasped out in a voice like the clattering of sticks.

"*Rien!*" it came mechanically.

"And that's the best thing too," said the little man as he impatiently pushed up his flashing spectacles.

In the evening, Lou sat cowering in a corner of the back staircase. In his hand he held the locket, which sparkled in the yellow gaslight streaming in through a little round window. He twisted and turned the trinket from side to side, examining it again and again with the utmost care.

If he could only open it! It had lain against his master's heart—they found the broken ribbon still hanging round his neck. The shot had grazed it, and it was slightly crushed. It would not open, and Lou did not like to force it.

How silent it was out here upon the stairs! From the courtyard came the thud of horses' hoofs, and a groom sang mournfully to the scraping accompaniment of the curry-comb. The dull roll of the carriages rose from the street, and now and then, as a heavier vehicle rattled past, the whole house trembled with the staircase upon which Lou sat.

He never remembered having felt this trembling

before. Was the ground rocking beneath his feet?

But there was yet another sound through it all. Where did it come from—what was it? It had rung in Lou's ears since the morning, and he could not get rid of it. With a sharp whiz it cut through the air, and drew back again with a shrill whistling jerk. As it grew louder, Lou's back arched involuntarily.

Ah, the awful lash of Cairo! In weird serpentine curves it hissed about his head. The name of that great lash is Fate—and it was upon him again! Lou's heart contracted with a dark foreboding.

A dog barked in the courtyard—Zeppa's ringing voice.

"Ah, Zeppa! Zeppa!" cried Lou joyfully. Hastily concealing his locket in his amulet-bag—the receptacle too for his small savings—he bounded down the stairs.

Zeppa was his friend! The only friend he had in the world now that the others had forsaken him—his dead Moussou upstairs—and she, "for whom he might have killed himself had he been a gentleman."

He would pour out all his griefs to Zeppa—he understood him—the dog understood him.

CHAPTER II.

“JE VOUS AIME”

IT was four years ago, a few days after his arrival in Paris, that Lou first met her.

It happened in a narrow passage in the house, as they both turned a corner sharply in opposite directions, each bound on some hurried mission. They drew up short, each startled by the other. The blackamoor, starting up suddenly before her in the half-dark, might have been some unholy apparition. How weirdly the broad-grinning ivory of his teeth, with the bright red strip of tongue between, gleamed out from the dusky brown of his face! Positively, a sort of ghostly phosphorescent light emanated from that mouth, while in the large black hollows of the eyes there was no trace of white to be seen ; only two tiny sparks of light glittered there.

She was just crossing the broad shaft of noon-day sunshine which streamed down from a top

window of the corridor, sharply defined and alive with dancing specks of golden dust. In that glaring light her red hair blazed before him like a torch. He had never seen anything like it ; waves of living fire she carried on her head ! The light breeze fanned the loosened locks into flickering tongues of flame around the tiny face—one almost heard them hiss and crackle.

The unquenchable, glowing depths of red in her hair seemed to have absorbed every other trace of colour out of the delicate face, so pale were the cheeks, and the eyes so like two bright colourless diamonds in the strong light.

She gave a little shriek—his rows of teeth broadened and grew more glittering white.

At this the Paris *gamin* in the little girl broke out. She burst into a peal of laughter which echoed through the long corridor, and with her little pert nose in the air she gazed unabashed into his astonished face.

Yes, monsieur ! she too had teeth that were worth showing ; but straight rows of little sharp pearls which were made for laughing—not great nutcrackers like yours, monsieur !

With a mocking curtsey and a politely intoned "Monsieur !" she slipped past him, leaving him spell-bound as if he had seen a vision.

He had certainly been far more startled by her than she by him. Bah ! what a lot of black men there are in Paris, even without counting those in the cigar-shops ! But still one would like to examine this stick of a savage a little closer.

“To our next merry meeting !” she called after him.

That next meeting occurred in the courtyard. She had had the ill-luck to upset the wooden bowl of beads she was going to thread—her daily occupation—all over the wet flags. Out of the den where her father the cobbler patched up the most wretched shoes in Paris whizzed a leather strap, which descended smartly on the tender shoulders of the half-fledged girl, making her cry out and writhe with pain.

Lou, who was just crossing the courtyard, winced as if he had received the blow. Stay—here was a connecting link ! pain made them akin. All his shyness of the little firebrand vanished from that moment.

As she stooped to repair the mischief, he, without a moment’s hesitation, knelt down too and began laboriously picking up the fallen beads. It was no easy task—the gay specks rolled away from under his clumsy fingers as if they were bewitched. As he shook his head in desperation,

she could not help laughing, in spite of the pain which still burned across her shoulders.

It happened that in the heat of their work they bumped their heads together. Her laughter shrilled out like the sudden stroke of a bell. But he was greatly disconcerted, and remained on his knees, grinning broadly at her.

"How stupid he looks!" thought she, "but a good-hearted fellow!"

Three times on the following night when Lou slept upon his bear-skin did he start up, wakened by the sound of a bell. The Marquis's door-bell had a very different tone—much lower, more muffled, not so silvery clear. He rubbed his eyes, and throwing back his head upon its accustomed pillow—the great bear's head—he tittered to himself; why, it was Lili's laughter he had heard in his dreams!

Something of the little mother awoke in her. What if she were to take him in hand and lick him—this savage—into a more presentable shape? Should she teach him to enjoy the air of Paris in its widest sense? Would it not be possible to turn the jaw-breaking gibberish which he could only have learned in a cage at the "Jardin d'Acclimation" into decent French? No doubt it would cost a world of trouble; never mind, one would

have to begin it in play. What a unique plaything, and what an exciting game !

She proceeded to act upon this caprice. The lessons were most curious ; broken scraps of education thrown to him in passing, a variety of corrections which he was forced to adopt, whether he liked it or not—fragments of speeches, slang, exercises in pronunciation—all of which his teacher coaxed him into or forced upon him in her masterful way, in such quantities at last that he was fairly confused ; she literally stuffed him with learning.

“ Not that way, Lou ! Like this—listen ! ” Whereupon she executed a series of oval, round, and pointed figures with her lips, representing the different letters—a long-drawn A, a hollow O, a most insinuating I ; helping herself out with her fingers—snapping them around in the air, or, when things went too badly, clapping her little clenched fists together.

At first the teaching seemed to have been arranged for the sole purpose of her practising that solfeggio-like laugh. But he really was too clumsy with those thick lips of his, which one couldn’t have kissed—no, not for the whole world ! His teeth stood in his mouth like a stone wall.

“ Any one can eat with them, Lou, but you must

speak!" and she tapped her forefinger on her own fascinating little teeth.

However, she did not lose patience.

"Monsi—eur—s'il vous—plait."

Clearer than that—each syllable ringing as sharply as a coin—it was impossible to have the words pronounced for you.

"Mou—ssou—" began Lou—a good thick "Mou—ssou!"

"Capital! well done!" she scoffed at him in between.

"But, Lou! it is so simple, just listen now. It's not Mou—ssou, but Monsieur—*eu*, my good fellow, not *ou*. Now, once more."

Lou came out again with his "Moussou!"

"Oh, Lou, you are too funny! No—it's enough to make one die of laughing to see the faces he makes."

She clapped both her little hands to his mouth. "But you mustn't bite, Moussou," she laughed. And "Moussou! Moussouou!" she called after him far up the stairs as he hurried away.

For all that, he made progress. After some months of this backstairs schooling he could at least make himself partially understood. But the lessons came to an abrupt standstill before an obstacle, and that obstacle consisted of three words.

It happened in the stable, in the midst of the hopping rabbits and the stamping of horses' hoofs.

"Lou, pay attention—something new!" And standing close before him, with a roguish glance, she cast three words at the earnest, listening face with its mouth open to devour this fresh piece of wisdom.

"Je vous aime! Je vous aime, Lou!" That seemed very difficult to him—he made a convulsive effort.

"He looks for all the world as if he were going to swallow a snake," she thought to herself.

She repeated it once more, slapping the satin back of the horse beside which she stood.

"Je—vous—aime!" and slap—slap—slap after each word, with a ringing smack at the end as a full-stop. The horse did not quite like it.

Lou began to imitate her.

"Shou—" came hissing through the wide, fish-like, projecting lips. "Shou—Fou!" with a blast that would have extinguished a furnace. Finally, the whole "Shou—Fou—Zaime!" And again, rather more fluently, "Shou—Fou—Zaime!"

This time she only smiled, funny as it sounded.

"Lou, do you know what it means?" she

asked, with her face still closer to his, a faint quivering coming and going between her brows and playing round her little nose and mouth.

He shook his head. "Rien," said he.

"Do you know what that means? That is what it is, Lou." She panted her own heart, and then pointed to his.

Still he did not understand, making incredibly stupid eyes.

"Je vous aime!" she cried, repeating the pantomime, and kissing the back of her hand with a meaning glance.

Over and over again she did it—quicker and quicker; then suddenly turned upon her heel and scampered off after a snow-white rabbit.

It was a wild chase into every corner, away over the heaped-up bundles of hay, into the granary till the oats pelted down like hail, in and out between the very feet of the horses she clutched at the skipping little animal. The horses grew restless and tugged at their halters, the grizzly old bear of a groom growled in his deepest bass, cans and pails were upset, giving a long droning echo. And above all this turmoil fluttered the lark-like trill of her silvery laugh, broken now and then by her wanton "Je vous aime! Je vous aime!"

At last she managed to catch the wriggling creature, and, holding it tight in her arms, she gazed tenderly—oh, so tenderly—into its bleared, pink eyes.

“*Je vous aime, mon petit !*” and she pressed loud resounding kisses on its flesh-coloured nose.

Glancing just then at Lou, she was so startled that she nearly let the rabbit fall. What had come over him ?

A sombre flame shot from his dark eyes, and his sensitive nostrils quivered violently, as if to prelude an outburst of African savagery.

Yes, he understood her at last ! He knew what “*je vous aime*” meant, and a secret fear possessed her that he would convert the words all too plainly into deeds.

Alas ! he had given his heart for a few French phrases. Between spelling and laughter—at the foot of the stairs—in the creaking doorway—to the slapping of the carpet-beater—while the broom swept over the courtyard pavement, he had lost it, bit by bit. And now that she had possessed herself of this simplest of human hearts, was she going to play with it as a child plays with a sugar heart, only to bite into it at last with its sharp little teeth ?

No ; the coquette in this budding little Parisian

was not quite ripe for that. But she had begun to try her strength, and an idea rose up dimly before her, that she would one day be called upon to break many a more complicated and storm-proof heart than this.

After this there was never a word between them of a similar explanation.

On the evening after the occurrence in the stables, Lou was sitting on his heels in front of the great bear's head which served him for a pillow, deep in thought, staring at the glass eyes glittering in the candle-light, at the great jaws lined with scarlet cloth and the terribly forbidding fangs. A ceaseless murmur came from his lips labouring in mute activity to produce certain words, but in vain.

A hot breath swept across his shoulder. He started guiltily. It was Zeppa who had crept in noiselessly over the carpet and now proceeded to snuff at the bear's head. The dog broke into a suppressed bark.

It really seemed as though Lou were ashamed—he was shy of the dog. What an uncomfortably penetrating gaze he had—an almost human tone sounded through his baying.

The blood rushed to the Nubian's face—the dog had surprised him in something foreign to

his nature—something which he did not fathom himself. With unwonted emotion he clasped his arms about the hound's broad neck, leaning his head against the warm coat, and so held him for a while in an almost tender embrace.

But later on, when he lay stretched upon his bear-skin, a senseless, foolish little question kept running in his head between waking and sleeping : Were there perhaps dogs with better hearts than some human beings ?

CHAPTER III.

“L'INTRIGANT.”

FROM that day a great friendship sprang up between Lou and Zeppa.

Lili was not at all pleased. Had she not gradually risen in the eyes of the Nubian to the position of a bright and dazzling idol? And she knew that with the sacrificial spirit of his race he would cheerfully let himself be cut in pieces for the idol he adored. Was she now to be cast down from her altar—nay, even pushed aside one hand's-breadth, by—a dog? A pretty state of things, indeed!—against every law of Nature and fitness. But after all he was a barbarian, “and with such people you never know——”

She was determined therefore to assert her position with all the force of her obstinate will. She was kind to him, and began to look after him like a real mother.

In this she was egged on by vanity, but

through that vanity there glowed a tiny flame of gratitude. Behold—this pitiable, dark-skinned heathen, without a home in the world, passing from hand to hand for money like a chattel—here he was, bowing down in silent, touching adoration before her who was herself not much more than a chattel!

A fine specimen indeed to make an idol of—a red-haired thing which could not fail to call forth the cheap jeers of the gutter ; conspicuous by its delicate, almost sickly pallor, as if it must suffer under the weight of the luxuriant masses of that hair ; not exactly ugly, and yet not pretty ; wilful, with short defiant answers—untrained to any work. Ah, what tears she had shed about her red hair ! and tears always brought her drunken father's strap into action. In truth, she was a poor, unenviable creature, and might well be grateful even for such a worshipper as Lou.

Now she actually insisted on sauntering about the streets with him. Both drawn to their full height, they walked along as if each were proud of showing off the other. She made no further effort to repress the glowing abundance of her hair, or even to render it less remarkable by covering it in any way ; no, she let the waving locks flutter out behind her in the wind, and as

he too wore a glaring piece of red in the shape of a fez at the back of his head, the *gamins* of the neighbourhood would call after them, "Look! a pair of sorrels!" Then Lili's eyes would dance with joy, while her little teeth gleamed in a laugh of perfect satisfaction. Lou was a good-looking fellow enough, she thought, with whom one need not be ashamed of showing oneself, and besides — how *extra* to be seen with a Nubian!

In the beginning Zeppa accompanied them. She permitted it, although she observed with growing displeasure how the attention of every passer-by was directed towards this wonderful prize specimen of a Danish hound; and she reckoned that, as the attention of the public was now divided amongst the three of them, Lou and she were being done out of their proper share. This must be put a stop to.

"We will leave the dog at home!" she said in her usual tone, which came very near to being despotic.

Lou shrugged his shoulders while he tried to keep the dog off, as he playfully sprang upon him. What was to be done? You could not chain up a good sensible dog like that, as if he were a common watch-dog.

" Well, let him come—I don't care ! " she said at last crossly.

By degrees he grew troublesome. As the two walked along he tried to push in between them—at first almost imperceptibly, gaining ground so slowly that they did not think of preventing him till the massive grey-brown head with its black, polished, sharply cut nose and serious eyes rose up between them, and the white forepaws kept step with their feet.

Then Lili began keeping very close to Lou, disputing the place with the animal ; it was no good, he always managed to seize an opportunity to squeeze himself into it again. They spoke kindly to him, they pushed him away by force ; all to no purpose, the next minute his hot breath would pant between them again.

Each in their own fashion forbade him seriously ; it made not the slightest impression on Zeppa, nor did he alter his peculiar tactics in any respect. Halting as it had been before, their conversation now came to an utter standstill ; the dog and his irritating ways occupied all their attention.

It was almost laughable ! He was making game of them, this *intrigant* of a dog, as Lili called him. He meant to come between them, not only literally in their walks, but in their

friendship too. Oh, it was not for nothing that he had wormed himself into Lou's affection ; he wanted to alienate the Nubian from her.

A feeling that looked strangely like jealousy began to torment the girl. She knew it was silly : she could not help laughing at herself. Was she in love with Lou that she should actually be jealous of the dog ?

She would put an end to it. The dog himself brought it about.

One afternoon they were walking along the pavement of the Boulevard Haussmann, the dog as usual trotting between them, large and dignified, as if he were the most important of the three. All at once the broad neck stiffened, the docked ears quivered, and they both felt the blow of his tail against them. The next instant with great bounds Zeppa hurled himself upon a black Newfoundland, in whom he no doubt recognised an enemy.

He dashed the girl and her companion aside as he sprang, Lili losing her balance and falling against a stout perspiring gentleman. A little boy was run down by the dog, and pointed with tears and complaints to the hole in his trousers. Everybody scolded, a crowd gathered round the fighting dogs, which now were mingled in one

horrid, struggling, swaying ball, from which muffled bark and howls proceeded, while tufts of black and brown hair eddied around.

Lou called and scolded, and tried to clutch at the infuriated animals to separate them. The crowd laughed. "Let them fight it out!" they cried.

At length they let go, snapped viciously once or twice at each other without biting, then, casting contemptuous side glances over their shoulders, they sloped off in opposite directions, their tails between their legs.

Zeppa's muzzle was covered with white, blood-flecked foam; he gave himself a tremendous rustling shake as if he were going to throw off his entire dishevelled coat, and then proceeded to blow and sneeze till he had cleared his teeth of his enemy's fur. His deep chest heaved stormily, and when Lou seized him by the collar, he bayed again, as if still in the heat of battle.

But where was Lili? He looked in every direction, but could see no trace of the girl. She might have stood by him in the fray—they were equally responsible for the dog. With a presentiment of impending evil, he turned hastily homewards with Zeppa.

As he entered the courtyard, he saw Lili

standing at the pump, wielding the ponderous handle, a task which seemed to demand a vast amount of exertion. Her sleeves had slipped far back, disclosing the shining white arms ; her pliant figure swayed to and fro with the motion, and her heels tapped as her little feet rose and fell.

He hastened to her side to help her, as he had often done before, but she turned upon him with flaming cheeks and flashing eyes, her teeth buried deep in her nether lip ; and with an unmistakable, half-contemptuous jerk of the shoulder rejected his help.

Then she went furiously to work at the pump, till the water gushed out in an ever-broadening stream ; but evidently not enough for her, although the pail brimmed over long ago. The handle creaked aloud, and the water rushed with increasing force till it overflowed the little basin—it was as if she had opened the floodgates of her wrath. A wide stream poured over the flags of the courtyard, but the white arms never paused in their work.

Presently up ran the dog to cool his hot steaming muzzle in the refreshing flood, lapping and swallowing noisily.

That made her stop ; and then the storm

burst. Half turning to Lou and tossing her hair back violently from her face, she cried in a voice husky with rage: "I'm going to speak very plainly, Lou!—do you understand? Things must be settled about that dog! I won't put up with it—do you hear? I will not be thrown aside to please—a Moussou—of a dog!"

But at this point she was aware that the Nubian understood no more of what she was saying, than if it had been the rushing of the pump-water. She turned full upon him now, an angry line coming and going between her brows, as if he had been her worst enemy.

Pointing to the dog with an imperious sweep of the arm, she said slowly—emphasising each syllable, "Lou, either *he* or *I*. Do you understand me?" Her voice shook.

Lou did not understand, and only stared at her, half startled, half amazed, and gently shook his head.

"You need not glare at me! What I say, I mean—*basta!* If you don't like it, you can leave it!"

Alas! he still did not understand; neither the words nor the accompanying gestures.

In a temper at having to take so much trouble to make her meaning clear she stamped her foot

upon the ground. Then she began again, this time quite slowly, each syllable sharp and pointed—cut and thrust.

"Lou!—that—dog—there—go—with Lou or Lili—go—with—Lou! Lou, choose—Lili or Zeppa!" and discharged the full measure of her wrath at him in one hissing *Compris*?

Then seizing the pail and pouring away some of its contents, she took no further notice of Lou and went away, taking very short quick steps, bending low on the left side under the weight of the pail, her other arm held out stiffly at right angles and swinging ostentatiously from side to side.

Lou stood petrified, his eyes fixed upon the yawning blackness of the doorway through which the girl had vanished. He felt as though something within him had suddenly been cleft in twain, and that neither half could possibly retain its vitality.

"Lili or Zeppa," he murmured at last. "What—all is over? Lili *rien*—and that the dog's fault?"

A dog is but a dog, after all. Who cares for a dog? One kicks him, beats him, or, if he is refractory, simply shoots him through the head.

For one moment his memory reverted to the

swarms of evil-smelling pariah dogs of Cairo, who know no master and feed on offal. But that one—with his wise head reflected in the water while he drinks—surely he is more than a dog ! Would Moussou value him so highly and take such care of him if he were nothing more than an ordinary animal ?

On the other hand, Lili, is she not far above the rest of her sex—those women “with much hair and little sense”? His idol to be torn from him—and by Zeppa! who, after all, wore the outward semblance of a dog with all the weaknesses appertaining thereto.

A faint smile played about his mouth, but a smile that was not natural to him—only a narrow strip of teeth gleamed between his lips—with something in it of scornful pity for himself, that he had been so near giving that dog so large a place in his heart.

He turned away without vouchsafing another glance at the animal, and very slowly and thoughtfully he crept upstairs.

The Marquis was not at home. Lou was standing at the window of the bedroom still pondering deeply, when he heard a faint scratching at the door—it was the dog. The blood rushed to his face—Lili or Zeppa !

The scratching continued. Lou pretended not to hear—he did not want to—and leaned out still further over the balustrade.

Now it grew more urgent, accompanied by a low beseeching whimper. Still Lou did not stir, only he ground his teeth softly. He would show them who was to be master here—a man or a dog.

The scratching now changed to an imperious knocking, till the door groaned again as the dog threw himself heavily against it, with a low half-angry growl.

Then Lou arose, striking his hands impatiently upon the gilded railing. As he crossed the room, he chanced to catch sight of Moussou's riding-whip. How it sparkled! the eye was attracted to the handle as if by some magnetic power—one was forced to look at it.

Suddenly he turned back three steps and stood close before that handle. His lips apart, but the teeth tightly clenched, his nostrils quivering, he stood as if enthralled, and gazed with longing eyes at the whip.

He thought of the lash of Cairo, and felt again its stinging blow upon his shoulders. The hot blood surged to his head, and a sudden thirst for revenge, such as he had never felt before, seized upon him.

Oh, to be able—only once—to play the master ! for half a minute—just for three strokes of the lash !

He had the whip in his hand ; with half-closed eyes he felt the fine engraving on the handle, passed his fingers down the slim length of the thong. A stroke whistled through the air—a second one—it sounded like a scream. Lou's eyes glittered ; that stroke seemed to break the tension—it was like a cry of relief !

Outside, the door shook so violently under the dog's furious onslaught, that it threatened to burst in. Lou hastened to open it, whip in hand.

He was not going to strike Zeppa—oh, no—he would not beat the dog ; but when it rushed in tempestuously, still excited from the recent fight and the unsuccessful knocking at the door, he was overcome by sudden fury at the recollection of what had passed, and he let the whip whiz down upon Zeppa's back—twice—three times—again and again, from a greater height, harder and harder as each stroke fanned his fury to an intenser pitch.

At first Zeppa could not believe he was in earnest ; barking and gambolling, he tried to resist the first few blows ; then, as a harder one came crashing down, a long-drawn howl escaped him,

till he writhed upon the floor with low and piteous whines.

Why did he not flee from the blows? Instead of that he only crawled nearer and nearer; this puzzled Lou. The dog pressed closer, and now, strange to say, it was Lou who slowly receded. The whip, though still raised threateningly, struck no further blow.

Before Lou could put the whip back in its place, he was stricken with remorse for what he had done; it burned like fire in his hand; he hastened to hang it up again, and then stood there bowed down by shame. At intervals a long-drawn sigh came from the next room—it sounded like a reproach.

He ought not to have done it. Was it not his affection for Lou which had led the dog to be so importunate?

It is true, Lili wished it; but must one always obey Lili? Alas! poor Lou—yes, one *must*.

If he could but scourge himself and so atone for what he had done! He could not bear those sighs, and hurried out to make his peace with the dog.

He found him lying on the floor with outstretched fore-paws, his head laid flat upon them, breathing heavily. As Lou approached, he only

raised his eyes, but raised them higher and higher till a half-moon of white was visible beneath the dark iris—a thing which seldom happened. It was a mute, sad, earnest look. The sighs then ceased.

Lou would have stooped to stroke the dog with a few propitiating words, but Zeppa's eyes said—no. They kept him spell-bound, he dared not stoop—could not utter a syllable. Unable to endure it any longer, he stole slowly away with drooping head, making a wide circuit to avoid that awful gaze.

Once outside he breathed more freely. Then he shuddered; that dog was surely human!

Far into the night, when the Marquis returned, he found the Nubian with wild and troubled face sitting before an expiring candle.

“What is this for? what does it mean?” cried he.

Lou started, cast a hesitating look at his master, and then threw himself at his feet. In his hand he held the whip, and offering it to the Marquis, he stammered out: “Lou bad—Lou beat Zeppa! Zeppa good—very good; Lou bad. Moussou beat Lou!”

“What are you thinking of? What do you mean?” cried the Marquis impatiently.

Then Lou's beseeching voice, "Moussou, beat Lou!" and he held the whip up high in both hands.

The Marquis had no idea what he meant, and shook his head in wonder; at last he took the whip and drew it lightly—a half-playful stroke—across Lou's back.

"Lou, you are quite mad; off with you to your bear-skin!"

From that time peace reigned between the three. "That dog is as wise as a person," said Lili: "*as good* as a person," corrected Lou.

Zeppa showed himself magnanimous, and seemed to bear the Nubian no ill-will; nor did he reproach him by another of those uncanny human looks. Lou gradually got over his sense of discomfort, and the old friendship cemented itself anew. But deep down in his heart he was conscious of owing the dog a reparation which he vowed he would carry out sooner or later.

From that day forward, Zeppa was never again seen in the street with "the pair of sorrels."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASCADES.

ONE Sunday in August, Lili and Lou went over to the fair at St. Cloud to see the great fountains play.

They sat together on the top of the tramcar in the glaring light of the noonday sun.

“A delicious couple!” whispered the other passengers, as they made room for them on the seat.

At first Lili’s flushed face wore an embarrassed smile, but the old combative spirit soon reasserted itself, and she curled her little defiant nose, tossing back her magnificent mane with a gesture which absolutely challenged remark.

No—she was not going to be ashamed of Lou—not to-day. Latterly, an idea had sometimes dawned upon her that she might possibly be worthy of a less unsophisticated, even of a lighter coloured, admirer. She had gradually outgrown

her father's chastising strap, and had developed a charming figure, tripping along daintily on two truly Parisian little feet. She was not beautiful, strictly speaking, but the dazzling alabaster of her skin, now in August lightly sprinkled with freckles, might have excited the envy of many a Paris lady ; and whereas her red hair had been the sport of the street when she was a child, she was now assured by certain competent critics that just that shade was so perfect—and how glorious in such masses !—she would assuredly make her fortune with it yet. Besides which her merry eyes shone with such a heavenly blue, that they always recalled to Lou the azure January sky of Cairo.

Yes, she had long ceased to be the poor neglected creature of those days, when she bid fair to fade away in the mouldy darkness of the *arrière logis*. They had placed her in a millinery establishment near one of the great Boulevards, from whence she began to peer ever more inquisitively into the sparkling life of the great city.

But for all that, she was not going to forsake Lou just yet. For two years they had been friends in a plain, honest, straightforward way, without one throb of passion—a friendship which went without saying. She was really fond of him, she had got accustomed to him, she was sorry for him,

and—she was biding her time—her time which had not yet come.

Truly, a delicious couple! A thirst for higher culture sometimes attacked Lou, not infrequently covering his teacher with confusion. To-day he was possessed by a very demon of dandyism; upon his small woolly head, which threatened to disappear beneath it, he wore a not very fashionable and unusually high top-hat; his hands were rammed into black kid gloves, bursting at every seam; a gigantic pale-blue cravat, and a frail walking-stick with a white bone handle which, according to the fashion he had observed in Moussou's friends, he tapped against his teeth, completed his costume. Abnormally serious, very upright and important he sat there with all the air of showing to the world a true specimen of the born Parisian. Yet through all his bizarre, negro vanity, there throbbed the deep joy of being permitted to sit by Lili's side before the gaze of the great, staring Sunday world.

Presently they found themselves carried along through the fair with the stream of the jostling crowd enveloped in clouds of hot golden dust. The all-pervading, ear-piercing noise only seemed to add to the oppression of the air, composed as it was of the merciless blaring of the trumpets,

the exasperating drone of the hurdy-gurdies, the strident shouts of the showmen, the hard tam-tam of the drums, and the shrill laughter of swinging girls, while here and there the chaos of sound was refreshingly broken by a child's cry of delight at its unspeakable good-luck in winning a sugar figure in the Tombola.

However often the two might be hustled apart by the crowd, there was no fear of their losing one another ; Lou's dusky head and freshly ironed hat and Lili's flaming looks were easily distinguished wherever they might be.

Suddenly Lou stood stock-still and beckoned to her with outstretched arm, long and stiff as a semaphore, offering a rock-like resistance to the crowd which surged around him. At length she succeeded in making her way to his side.

"What was the matter ? what did he want ?" With beaming eyes and expansive grin he pointed to one of the stalls.

"What do you want, Lou ?" she asked again.

"Lou buy Lili something pretty," he answered pointing to a stall where a brilliant, confused heap of jewellery flashed and sparkled like a display of fireworks.

"Nonsense, Lou, don't be silly ; what do you mean ?" said Lili ; "come along !"

But he had already escaped from her, and when she caught sight of him again he was standing at the stall, letting his enraptured eyes rove over the glories spread out before him, till he found what he sought.

With a knowing smile the stout saleswoman took down from a shelf a showy chain, having a great heart attached to it. Was that what he was going to give her?

Sure enough, here he came, radiant with delight—more than happy—swinging the jingling thing in his hand, to the huge amusement of the lookers-on.

"But, Lou, what are you doing? You must not—come, we will give it back again!"

Lili's face was suffused with burning blushes, but the next moment the tide had borne them along far away from the fatal stall.

But out in the park, as they were walking silently across a sun-warmed emerald green patch of meadow, Lou suddenly halted in front of her and proceeded to hang the chain round her neck.

She would have checked him with a movement; but glancing at his face she let him have his way, For there again was that same rapt, almost austerely earnest, look which had terrified her that day in the stable.

How the great gilded heart glared and shone in the sunlight!—how Lou's eyes flamed responsive to the splendour! He tried to speak—his lips worked awkwardly—at last it came.

"Shou—Fou Zaime! Shou Fou Zaime, Lili!" and through the clumsy stumbling words there rang a tremulous note of passion.

If she had looked at him—now, at this moment—as he poured out the pent-up feeling of two years, which had often filled his heart to bursting—poured it out in the three poor words he had learned from her; if of her charity she had but bestowed one glance upon him, he might, perhaps, have plucked up courage to touch his cherished idol—might even have gone so far as to kiss the flounced hem of her muslin gown.

But she did not raise her eyes. The spikes of the necklace had caught in her hair, and with uplifted arms she strove impatiently to disentangle it. Her teeth were fixed in her underlip, while the angry red and white flitted across her face like summer clouds. It was a long time before the chain was free.

And still no glance for him. The silence was oppressive: far away a thrush sang loud and cheerily, and seemed to mock them.

Later on they sat at a shaky table in front of

the terraced structure which serves as a stage to the famous cascades of St. Cloud.

As yet there was no water visible: on the highest terrace a few gold-laced officials strutted about with important demeanour. The crowd wailed in eager expectancy. In the increasing brightness of the late autumn sunshine the light dresses and silk parasols gleamed and glistened amongst the bronze-green foliage. Gay ribbons fluttered airily, and white handkerchiefs fanned the glowing faces. Little children, with broad pink sashes and bare pink legs, balanced themselves on the slippery stone edges of the lower fountains. A childlike gaiety beamed from the faces of the expectant throng as from a second sun.

If only the necklace round Lili's throat would not flash so obtrusively! How could Lou have picked out such a monstrosity of bad taste? It had that bombastic air so dear to the heart of stage queens. Lou must have had the picture of a gaudy overladen Madonna in his mind when he hung that flashy trinket round her neck. And whose fault was it but her own if he worshipped her as a Christian would a Madonna?

The heart attracted every eye. Its brightness seemed to increase: she might turn her back to

the sunshine as she would, it gleamed like a beacon upon her bosom. She would have given anything to get rid of it. Lou was a good fellow—one couldn't help being sorry for him ; but certainly his taste went appallingly far back into African barbarism.

The cascades ! The cascades !

A tremor passed along the closely packed crowd, as when an ant-heap is disturbed. Everybody rose. "Sit still !" was the cry. Glasses were upset, chairs overturned—some of the women screamed. Then, "There it comes ! there it comes !" The children shrieked with delight.

At first there was only a line of bubbling white foam on the topmost terrace. It increased, grew, spread itself out, reared itself on high, and one could hear the rushing above the tumult of the audience. A shining silver band came rippling over the steps ; this, too, grew deeper and broader, and then flung itself with a rush and a roar into the great basin below. Water-jets shot up in flashing, glittering sheaves—higher, bolder, intensely white against the slate-blue sky.

Then fresh jets, fresh cascades, fresh surprises ! The whole terrace boiled and bubbled and leapt in one enchanting snow-white chaos. A refreshing

coolness wafted down, while the thunder of the waters quite extinguished the enthusiastic applause which arose on all sides. A mist hovered over the water, on which the sun played in delicate brilliant rainbows.

Lou was struck dumb with admiration, opening his great innocent eyes to their widest extent. But in the dim recesses of his memory he was conscious of a similar scene rising up before him — a cataract of white waters foaming and tumbling over brown rocks and bridged over by just such a glowing arch of rainbow colours.

Where was it? when was it?

After the first burst of enthusiasm he turned to Lili.

What had become of the necklace? It no longer flashed upon her neck!

A sickening fear assailed him that she had taken it off while the fountains played: he stared at her blankly. Alas! she was ashamed of Lou's present. Surely she did not love him: and he would have given his life for her—there, at that very instant.

There was a strained smile on Lili's face. She actually had unclasped the chain, very cautiously, when the cascades began to play. Lou turned once more towards the fountains—right round, so

that Lili might not see his face, and raised his eyes again in wonder to the magic play of frothing waters. But while he appeared to be absorbed in gazing, something wet and glistening obscured his vision, and two great tears rolled slowly—very slowly—over the brown cheeks.

Was he dazzled by the fountains, or was some new undreamed-of anguish clutching at his heart, tighter and tighter, till it threatened to break?

No, she did not love Lou—she could not love him; and the two tears rolled on their way.

Six days after this Lili had disappeared! Gone—gone! Where? Nobody knew.

Had her father's strap driven her out into that howling wilderness called Paris? Had she been enticed away by an irresistible desire after happiness? Was she a lost drop in the mighty ocean of Paris life? or was she destined to shine, the brightest jewel of those glittering halls where beauty and genius reign supreme?

She was gone! "*Rien*," murmured Lou. "*Rien, rien!*" was the answer to all the questions and searchings of two long years. And now Moussou, too, had forsaken him.

Rien, poor Lou, once more—*Rien*!

CHAPTER V. ADVERTISEMENT.

PARIS was once more drowned in rain, in ceaseless, pouring rain, just as it had been four years ago when Lou arrived at the Gare du Sud. But this time there was no compassionate master ready to offer him a dry place inside a carriage. The driver of one of the last coaches beckoned him up to the high box-seat beside him, from whence he could overlook the whole slowly moving procession of carriages which were accompanying the body of the Marquis de Breteuilles to Père-la-Chaise.

The dismal grey night was beginning to fall, ushered in by heavy sodden clouds trailing low over the roofs, wiping out all the colour and all the life from the streets.

Only the glitter of the wet seemed to struggle against this all-extinguishing grey. The two mirror-like strips of pavement running along the

houses on either side looked smooth as ice, and shone with a silken iridescent light, over which flitted the black silhouettes of the hurrying foot passengers, with wavering shadows, their umbrellas casting faint fan-shaped reflections. It glistened and rippled down the window-panes, and in the larger rain pools of the carriage-way the drops danced in shining rings.

The driver by whose side Lou had found a place, was so enveloped in macintosh coat, hat and apron, that the rain had but little effect upon him. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, imposing personage, with the lofty air of a Cabinet Minister. Not a line moved, not an eyelid quivered in the fat overfed face—it, too, might have been made of india-rubber. On one cheek was a prominence, occasioned, no doubt, by the quid of tobacco he was engaged in chewing.

Beside him Lou appeared small and shrunken, sitting there all doubled up with rounded back, so much the reverse of his usual deportment, his whole frame shaking with cold in his thin gaudy Oriental livery. Heavy beads of rain dripped from the crinkly black hair, and the fez, dyed a reddish brown by the wet, hung at the back of his head like a saturated sponge.

"Why did you not bring your waterproof coat,

monsieur?" asked the husky bass voice of the driver.

Lou started out of his dreams. The man had said "monsieur"—was that meant for him?

He looked up in sudden amazement. The man sat motionless as one of the dummies Lou had often seen in the tailors' shops.

"*Rien*," he responded dejectedly after a pause. With a dexterous twist the coachman shot the tobacco into his other cheek.

"*Rien*—Moussou very kind—men take all—cloak—everything;" and to emphasise his *rien*, Lou gesticulated in the air with uplifted forefinger.

The coachman cast a hasty, sidelong glance down at him, said nothing, but raised his nose a little higher than it was before. Presently he nodded slightly, and a little waterfall splashed from the brim of his hat on to the waterproof apron, where it dispersed.

Finally he appeared to grasp the situation. The law had put its seal on the possessions of the Marquis, and at the same time, most likely, on the macintosh of the shivering servant beside him.

"That sort of thing does happen," observed the driver after some hesitation, as if the remark were

an effort, and describing an artistically correct curve with his whip over the backs of the horses.

Lou had sunk into himself again. With saddened heart and weary eyes he gazed past the stiffly erect figure of the coachman, across the glistening wet tops of the carriages, at the four black plumes surmounting the pillars of the hearse.

The hearse dragged heavily onwards, sometimes swaying from side to side as it passed over a rough piece of road, when the plumes would send down a shower of raindrops, glittering like diamonds in the brightness of the lighted shop-windows.

The lamps of the hearse glimmered dimly red through the veil of slanting rain. As it turned a corner the white-edged eye-holes in the mourning coverings of the horses glared from afar ; then the lamps would disappear—it seemed to Lou an eternity till they were visible again.

And still the rain poured down—the pitiless rain. The rain-pipes gurgled their melancholy song, the gutters swelled to rushing streams, and the wheels grated harshly as they slowly revolved. The water trickled down Lou's face in tiny rivulets, but no muscles in it moved, any more than in the hard bronze face of yonder rain-washed statue which they are just passing.

Ever and anon the waning daylight would be revived by a cheerful light. Reddish yellow streaks of gaslight streamed from the shops and quivered across the pavement. The street-lamps flashed out like glowing balls of mist through the damp air. A great *café* poured a dazzling flood of festive joyous light over the passing carriages, and breathed out a comfortable warm atmosphere. The horses quickened their pace a little, as if that warmth had acted on them like a kindly, cheering word.

Lou straightened himself with a jerk. From the high perch where he sat, his wandering gaze could penetrate this or that lighted window.

Here was a whole family at dinner, sitting closely packed round a table covered with smoking dishes ; a great twinkling spoon distributed soup into plates held high by little bare plump arms. There a gay fire burned in the grate, the window was slightly open, and one could hear the crackling of the flames and the light laughter of the elegant couple who reclined in armchairs, at each side, warming their feet.

At another window stood a nurse, holding in her arms a child clad only in its little shirt. It crowed with delight, and beat its little hands against the window-pane, snatching at the endless

line of carriages as they passed. Ah, how dry it was behind all those windows—how warm—how safe—how comfortable !

"Have you got another place yet, *mon cher*?" inquired the driver suddenly without looking at the Nubian ; it sounded hard and wooden as the voice of an automaton.

Lou was silent, an undefined sense of discomfort making him move restlessly on his seat.

"I asked if you had another place," repeated the coachman after a short pause.

Lou shook his head, sending down a shower of raindrops.

"No? Then I should advise you to see about getting one. Situations don't grow on the bushes like blackberries, I can tell you."

As Lou did not appear greatly impressed by these remarks, the driver unbent a little from his dignified composure. Rolling the quid of tobacco impatiently into the opposite cheek, he leaned slightly towards Lou, but still looking straight before him, he began persuasively :

"Look here, *mon vieux*, I know of a place for you. You might search a long while before you found such a good one. Don't you bother about it—just you come to me. You may think it a funny kind of move—from a Marquis to a cab-

man ; but look at the matter closer—plenty to eat and drink, and smoke like a chimney. You can live like a duke and work—not *so* much ;” and with the fingers of his one free hand he flipped away a little water which had gathered in the folds of his waterproof.

“ No, not that much ! You've only got to sit still up here on the box and open your mouth like the wooden nigger in the cigar-shop over there—not another thing. Now, what do you say ? Will you do it ? ”

Lou shot a bewildered glance at him. “ It's simply this, my knowing darkie—you shall represent my trade for me with that black face of yours. We call that advertisement. You will soon learn how much can be done with advertisement.”

“ Moussou dead ! ” answered Lou piteously.

“ Well, yes, of course, and you can't bring him to life again. Must have been a first-rate master, too. But there's no use in being sentimental about it. Why, don't you see what an advertisement it would make—the death and all that ? ”

Lou turned from him with a dim, uncertain feeling—half anger, half shame. His kind Moussou was not yet buried—they could surely wait till he had been laid to rest under the sod. Even

Moussou's dog, in his dumb grief, had refused food for two whole days, and it was only a dog—an animal whose very name was an affront amongst these civilised people.

The coachman nudged him gently. "Of course you would be wrapped up in india-rubber in weather like this, and in winter smothered in fur till you looked like a bear. Well?"

But even this did not stir the Nubian. Impatiently the other let the whip play on the horses' backs so that they started forward.

"Perhaps you think it would be dull to be always going to Père-la-Chaise? There you are quite mistaken. We are not undertakers only, we do everything—weddings, christenings, nice little pleasure trips with ladies and champagne—jolly, I assure you. We have to manage the funerals as well, of course—you can't leave your customers in the lurch; you christen and marry them, it's only decent that you should bury them too. You see it would be a very pleasant situation for you."

A pause. The procession was passing the prison of La Roquette, a few closely clipped heads were pressed against the black bars of the small, dingy windows looking down upon them.

The coachman made a last effort to gain Lou's

confidence by a feeble joke. Nodding his head in the direction of the windows, a faint ungainly smile playing round the fleshy lips. "The gentlemen in there aren't so badly off either, are they?" he said.

Lou sighed.

At this the other's patience gave out.

"Sacré nom de Dieu!" he cried; "if I had only come into the world with such a famous black face of my own, I'd soon make such an advertisement of it as would make the people stare!" And he shrugged his broad shoulders in contempt for his poor-spirited companion.

Advertisement—why always this advertisement? What was it? Some horrible thing pushing with a cold smile past the graves of those we love. Something of this sort passed through Lou's mind.

Just before they reached the gates of the church-yard the driver threw out the question once more. "Well, what is it to be? Have you thought it over? Will you come to me?"

Lou was seized with sudden frenzy. His first few words were in a language the other did not understand—his native Nubian, probably. Then, with infinite difficulty he succeeded in stammering out, "Lou very fond of Moussou—very fond!" He trembled with passion and his eyes flashed.

Let them first bury him—his kind Moussou—and let what would happen afterwards.

He wanted to say something to this effect, but the words failed him ; his stock was so limited, it was too difficult, and grief laid a torturing, burning grip upon his throat.

CHAPTER VI.

A RACE FOR ZEPPA.

ONE shovelful of earth after another fell with a dull thud into the Marquis's open grave, accompanied merely by a nod or a shake of the head as a last greeting. No tears were shed beside this grave, but the rain poured heavily upon the coffin ; no sigh was heard, only the wind which swept through the bushes round the higher lying graves contributed a mournful dirge to the general depression of the ceremony.

The dead man's friends were there—effeminate worldlings whose forms bent like helpless reeds beneath the force of the rain ; *elegants* with lack-lustre eyes and tired features, but all the more fiercely waxed moustaches.

On every face—in so far as they were distinguishable in the rapidly deepening shades of evening—the discomfort caused by the weather appeared to outweigh the grief for the friend.

An unusually large, hard lump of earth fell with a resounding blow upon the coffin-lid. Startled out of their professional apathy by the thunderous sound, the undertaker's men look up ; some of the dripping umbrellas were raised inquiringly.

It was Lou, naturally. Good old nigger ! they all knew him. He wished to send his master a specially loud farewell—quite right and proper. Or was it only that, with his well-known clumsiness, he had got hold of a more enormous lump of earth than anybody else ?

“ Moussou ! ” he moaned under his breath ; “ Moussou—Moussou ! ”

It sounded like a sad and touching protest against the sleeper down there, that he should have forsaken Lou—of his own free will, so unexpectedly, so precipitately.

As Lou walked down the centre path of the churchyard surrounded by groups of gossiping men, a good many remarks reached his ears which he might easily have applied to himself. He paid but little heed to them—most of it he did not understand.

“ How much did he cost him ? ” asked somebody.

“ The creditors will pull pretty long faces, he is

by far the most costly article of the whole legacy. Won't get a penny for him, however ; you can't sell him like a horse," was the answer in a tone of indifference.

"Wisby, my dear little Baron," called a voice further back, "supposing you took him and presented him to your goddess on her birthday ? You would not, of course, be able to hand her a nigger with one of those celebrated sighs of yours, as if he were a bouquet."

Lou suddenly pricked up his ears. He heard perfectly distinctly how some one behind him said to a companion, in a low tone so that the others might not hear : "I'll tell you what, I will take Lou, and you can have the dog."

Lou grew burning hot. Without having turned round he recognised the nasal voice of Count Cabrera. In one lightning flash he understood what the other remarks had meant.

They were disposing of him as they would of a piece of furniture ! And "you can have the dog !"

Every fibre in him quivered. What ! they would separate him from Zeppa ! Lou from his Zeppa !

"I would rather have Lou," rejoined the other voice. Lou recognised it too. It was M. de Fronsacques.

"Allow me to point out to you, my dear fellow," interposed Cabrera, "that you could find a block-head of a nigger like that any day, but you might search all Paris for such a prize as Zeppa. He would stand up to a bear if need be. You know he saved de Breteuille's life once at a boar hunt in Lorraine two years ago. A wonderful animal, let me tell you—magnificent prize winner! You would have to pay for him, of course; the Nubian you would get for nothing."

"All right," said de Fronsacques. He did not seem particularly keen either about the hound or that black dog called Lou. "But we shall have to catch on to them, in case the others are beforehand with us."

"We will drive there at once and fetch the dog. Just put it up at your place for the present, you can arrange with the creditors afterwards. And as to that fellow over there, why he will be glad enough to have a roof over his head."

The blood froze in Lou's veins—his heart stood still. Lou parted from Zeppa! No, in all his doubts and questionings as to the future, that had never entered his mind. Part from his best friend? Impossible!

What demon had put it into Cabrera's head! Surely they must know—they must understand

what the dog was to him, now—just at this time !

It must not, could not be ; he would prevent it !

A moment later and his resolve was taken. Lou will not leave Zeppa—to Zeppa he will be faithful and true. What should he do in all the wide world without the dog ?

Casting one furtive terror-stricken glance at the speakers behind him, he slipped past the foremost groups, and with long, cat-like bounds reached the entrance gate.

From there he set off up the Rue Roquette, running like the wind. But finding soon that he could not keep up this rate of speed, he settled down into the swinging trot of the professional runner.

He turned into the Boulevard Voltaire and ran, and ran, and ran ! The water in the puddles spurted up over his head ; he did not heed it—on ! on ! They were going to rob him of Zeppa.

People stood still and shook their heads at the strange being who fled past them. Now and then he ran against an open umbrella and there followed a storm of abuse. Policemen shouted after him, ladies sprang out of his way with a scream, as his firm and regular footfall splashed every one he

passed. He upset a child, and left it shrieking. In the Place du Château d'Eau he narrowly escaped being run over by a carriage, in front of which he tried to cross. After that he threw away the fez, the wet tassel of which swung in his face and impeded his sight.

Then on again—faster! faster!

Turning out of the Place, he took a shorter road to the Parc Monceaux than the funeral procession had come. But by doing so he had to thread a maze of narrow streets. At the Foire St. Martin he was suddenly seized with fear lest he should lose his way and so arrive too late. So he made for the great Boulevards again, the longer but the surer way round.

On he went down the Boulevard Nouvelle and the Boulevard Poissonnière. Not finding himself able to force his way quickly enough through the crowd of foot passengers on the pavement, he took to running along by the kerb-stone, close to the gutter, sometimes in it. It happened now and then that the end of a whip would catch him a sharp flick, and the wheels of a carriage passing near would splash him with mud from head to foot.

How he panted! His heart hammered in his breast and his blood seethed! But the rain

refreshed and revived him, although it drove in his face, sharp as needles. He opened his mouth wide, that the drops might cool the fire that scorched his tongue. The steam of his own gasping breath rose up round his face.

At first he had only thought of himself and the speed he could maintain, but now a suddenly awakened anxiety caused him to follow up every carriage which passed him—the fear that the robbers of his *Zeppa* might be sitting in one of them. With contracted eyes, watching and searching, he strove to pierce the chaos of vehicles of every description which whirled and rattled around him.

An elegant carriage came bowling along, drawn by two big bays champing their bits; that might be Cabrera, he drove just such bays.

Lou tried to recognise the coachman. All sorts of colours danced before his eyes, he could distinguish nothing clearly. Just then a match flared up inside the carriage and lighted up the pale features of the Count—or so, at least, his fancy assured him.

And the carriage flies past, leaving Lou behind.

At this he takes a fresh start, every muscle on the stretch, gathering up every scrap of will and strength which he possesses. He has caught

the carriage, and keeps up with it for a space. Heaven be praised ! they have reached the Boulevard Montmartre and are going down hill. Here he makes a rush and gets ahead of the carriage.

Down at the foot of the Boulevard it suddenly grows dark before his eyes. He staggers, clutches in the air at a support and grasps something moist. It is the head of a cab horse who has just lifted his dripping nose in wonder from the pail hanging round his neck. The beast has pity on him, and offers no objection when he seizes the pail and takes a draught from it.

Blessings—oh, blessings on it !

But where is the carriage now ? Gone—far away. Out of the extreme distance Lou fancies he can distinguish the sharp clang of those particular hoofs above all the other noises.

Up ! Away ! They are going to part him and Zeppa ! That may not, shall not be ! He struggles on along the Boulevard Haussmann. Then with a superhuman effort, gasping, desperate, breathless, putting forth his last strength he gains the top of the Boulevard Malesherbes. The bare, rain-blackened giant trees of the Parc Monceaux rise up before him.

At last—at last—there is Moussou's house ! Into it now !

The pale thin wife of the porter almost faints with fright as he bursts in, encrusted with mud, unrecognisable, with gasping breath—two fever glowing balls instead of eyes.

“Zeppa ! Zeppa there !” comes like a hoarse groan from his bursting breast.

The woman clasps her hands above her head. “Mon Dieu ! Mon Dieu ! Poor Lou—he must have gone out of his mind !”

He flies to the dog’s kennel—glares into it—it is empty ! The straw rustles—no ; it is he who is doing it. Empty ! Empty !

With a weird cry never heard before from human lips, half shriek, half groan, he falls prostrate in front of the kennel, striking his head heavily against the woodwork.

“*Zeppa rien*—*Zeppa rien*,” is his plaintive, moaning cry. For a moment he lies as if dead—he has fainted.

Then consciousness returns, and he gathers himself together once more. They have stolen Zeppa from him ; “*Lou rien without Zeppa !*”

He stumb'les to the wood-cellar. “Hé ! Zeppa ! Zeppa !” No answer—no trace of the dog.

To the stables ! At his shout one of the horses starts and rears ; it sounds so like a bark. But nothing here either—nothing.

One hope is left to him. The dog may be crouching upstairs in front of his master's door, where he has spent his days of silent mourning. He must be there.

Now up the stairs, leaving his footmarks on the soft carpet. Up one—two flights ;—something whimpers.

Lou holds his breath, the sudden unutterable joy makes his knees give way beneath him. Ah, it is Zeppa ! Zeppa's voice !

Two or three steps more, and something enormous, with heavy, thumping tread comes bounding down the stairs, hurling Lou against the banisters in the force of its rush.

“Zeppa—Zeppa !” he can only breathe the name in a last sigh of infinite relief.

His arms hang limp and trembling from his superhuman exertions ; he clasps them tight about Zeppa's neck, pressing his burning face against the dog's.

“Zeppa there—Zeppa there—not gone !” The dog licks the poor throbbing brow. Ah, how that revives, refreshes him !—the long tail meanwhile beating joyfully against the banisters till they shake and tremble.

After the first storm of greeting, Lou's fears return. Holding Zeppa's head tenderly between

both hands, and letting his gaze sink deep into the faithful eyes of his friend, a tremulous petition rises to his lips—"Zeppa will come? Zeppa be good? Lou kind!"

The dog understands him—oh yes! he certainly understands—would he otherwise bark and whine so joyously?

Immediately afterwards the porter's wife beheld the Nubian coming downstairs with Zeppa. One hand was laid upon the dog's broad back, his eyes flashed in triumph. At the gate they stopped, both looking cautiously about them for a moment. Lou gave a deep, long-drawn, heartfelt sigh of relief.

A carriage comes rolling along. They start forward instantly into the rain, Lou holding Zeppa by the collar. The dog presses close to his side, and Lou, half running, adapts his gait to Zeppa's long trot.

And so through the streets, further and further, without a thought as to their destination; only to get away—out of this horrible Paris!

They move on steadily till the lamps grow scarcer, and then cease altogether; and the two fugitives vanish into the thick darkness and the driving rain.

CHAPTER VII.

BIG DISHES.

FROM that time forward there were few traces of Lou and his friend. Now and then a gendarme would report at the bureau of his district, in a casual way, amongst a varied list of villainy and theft, that on the road to so-and-so he had stopped a black individual with a very large dog. This person, it is true, had been unable to produce any papers, but seeing that he did not appear dangerous to the public safety, he had been allowed to proceed. They must have come from some fair or other.

Lou probably avoided both the daylight and the frequented highways, for there they would be assailed by curious eyes. Nobody dared to come too near them, however, on account of the size and savage appearance of the dog. They sometimes passed the night in unfrequented wayside inns, and the innkeepers would tell strange stories

afterwards of the queer guests. And truly they were a strange couple.

There would come a tapping and scraping outside in the passage. The fat landlady would waddle out to see what it was. At the sight of the black fellow with a great dog she would start back, and "Martin!" she called to her husband.

Lou nodded, showed his teeth in a broad smile, and did his best to create a pleasing impression without much success.

"What did he want?" asked Martin peremptorily.

The dog yawned, disclosing the terrific expanse of his jaws. The landlady plucked nervously at her husband's sleeve.

"Want dish—dish of food, madame," answered Lou, and held out his hand with a piece of money in the palm.

"Big dish—very big," he added; "much hunger—big hunger."

He then described a circle with his hands to give them an idea of the size of dish he required, whereat everybody in the inn parlour laughed. In the end the guests would call him indoors. "*Rien*," said Lou, and trotted off to some adjoining outhouse, where he sat himself down.

They brought him a dish. "Bread," he proceeded to order, "not big—little."

They watched him, to see what would happen.

He crouched upon the ground, with his feet close to the dish in which the dog was absorbed, licking and gulping greedily. Lou, his chin in both hands, his elbows on his knees, followed every movement of the animal with the keenest interest, serene happiness beaming from every feature.

If the dog left off eating—having probably had enough—Lou would encourage him to go on, pressing his head down again with caressing hands till the dish was licked clean.

Then only would Lou take the piece of bread he had ordered for himself, and begin biting into it with his magnificent teeth.

"Mon Dieu! can it be possible!" cried the landlady. "Such a dog! and such a man!"

They invited Lou into the parlour and gave him something to eat, which he reluctantly accepted. They put wine before him, and were delighted when he laboriously brought out his little stock of words. They plied him with drink more and more, till at last they had to carry him to his bed, dead drunk.

Awakening next morning from a hideous sleep, he groped about him in the grey dawn—the place was empty!

He sprang to his feet like a wild beast, and stood with clenched fists and rolling eyes.

“Zeppa!” he roared, “Zeppa—a—a!” so loud and prolonged that the whole house was roused.

What was the matter? Why, there was the dog! He had simply curled himself up somewhere else during the night. Angry at the disturbance, they bade the noisy fellow go his way as fast as possible.

After that night no persuasion could induce Lou to touch another drop of intoxicating liquor—he was afraid of losing the dog during a drunken fit.

He would lie down beside the animal with one hand tightly clasped round its massive metal collar. Sometimes they found him with his head pillow'd on the dog's—a reminiscence of Moussou's bear-skin.

Throughout one whole summer Lou fed his friend off “big dishes”; he had to make up to the dog for the beating he had once given him. And he would be faithful to him—that he had sworn over and over again.

In the beginning he ordered dinner for himself as well. But when he discovered how terribly fast his little hoard of money melted away, he contented himself with dry bread and let the dog eat his fill. Only now and then, when the dish happened to be unusually big, would he take a spoon and eat from the same plate as the dog.

Then there came a time when he ceased to lay so much stress on the size of the dishes he ordered. Reluctantly and with secret sighs he gave out the money.

He beat his brains perpetually, making the most difficult calculations as to how many dishes of food he could set before Zeppa with the money which remained to him.

- Alas! the dog paid small heed to these calculations. He ate everything and enjoyed it, and never noticed how Lou's look of ecstatic delight at his appetite changed by slow degrees and became troubled and careworn. Zeppa's appetite seemed only to increase, filling Lou with horror. What was to be done when the last coin had been exchanged for a "big dish"?

He even tried to give the dog a hint on the subject. Zeppa did not see it and ate on. At last he told him straight out—very gently, of course, in his most loving tones :

"Zeppa be good—be good—must love Lou."

The dog answered with one of his high-pitched barks.

"Zeppa good, but Zeppa eat a lot ; Zeppa eat up all the money—Lou soon have no more money. Zeppa, Lou beg."

Still the dog did not understand, and broke into a low whine of pleasure at the caressing tones of his friend's voice.

Then came the last "big dish."

The sound of the dog's loud licking drowned the sighs with which Lou gave vent to his distress. In his hand he held the locket, turned it this way and that ; how many dishes might he not buy if he sold it !

No, he must not—that is his last souvenir of kind Moussou ; it had fallen from his bullet-pierced breast. No ; better beg than do that.

So the Nubian began to beg—Lou begged for Zeppa. It was not so easy, for when any one sent them away or treated them harshly the dog would set up his ominous growl. Perhaps it was hunger that made him so savage ; Lou might try to soothe him as he would.

Anyhow it was looked upon as intimidation, and the police were called upon to interfere.

That must have been the signal for a wild

chase. Fleeing and escaping, seeking refuge in swamps and rain-soaked woods, dragging themselves across snow-covered wilds, desperately hiding in inhospitable stone quarries, freezing, hungry ; and, added to it all, the feverish, maddening anxiety, all for their pitiful little bit of freedom.

CHAPTER VIII.

“MENAGERIE PIMENTO.”

A THUNDERSTORM hung over the wood towards which Lou and Zeppa were wending their way one afternoon in spring. A bank of slate-blue cloud rose slowly over the majestic crowns of the oaks, pushing its silvery edge further and further forward along the sultry grey sky. The sun struck the wood with sharp rays of yellow light, causing the foliage to stand out in glaring, golden bronze tints against the dark background of cloud, the leaves glittering and rustling in the chilly breeze which had suddenly sprung up.

A low prolonged growl resounded through the whispering and rustling of the trees. Seeking shelter from the advancing storm, the two wanderers struck across the ploughed fields over the brown furrows whose freshly upturned surfaces shone in the sunlight. They made their way over it with difficulty, panting with fatigue, the

dog's tongue hanging long and heavy from his dripping jaws.

Suddenly Zeppa stopped short, his ears pricked, his eyes lighting up. Hark ! through the growl of the thunder came a muffled roar. Was it only the storm ? No ; there it was again, heard distinctly above the thunder—deep, reverberating, hollow notes intensified by the echoing forest.

The dog stood still, peering sharply forwards, his tongue drawn in, his breath quickening. Then he sent forth a deep bay in the direction of the sound. It was answered by another—perhaps merely an echo.

A bird screeched shrilly, a horse neighed, voices shouted in between, and there arose forthwith a confused chorus of grunting, barking, and howling.

The dog was not to be held back ; with a mighty jerk he freed himself of Lou's restraining hand, and made off towards the wood, Lou pursuing him through the crackling undergrowth.

When he came up with him again, Zeppa was standing, hidden by a thick screen of brushwood, trembling in every limb, intensely excited and restraining his voice with difficulty.

Before them in the deep green shadow lay a forest glade, carpeted with soft, luxuriantly flowering grass, and shut in on every side by a

mighty wall of dark trees, their intervening spaces filled up with brushwood. Over it, like a canopy, hung the deepening storm-cloud, the whole scene forming a sort of hall wherein every sound reverberated against the massive walls.

A travelling menagerie was encamped upon the grass. The low-wheeled cages stood round in a semicircle, and behind the iron bars many coloured beasts paced to and fro in agitation. In the middle, its pale blue smoke curling in the air, crackled a fire at which some women were occupied in preparing a meal. The horses, freed of their trappings, grazed in the lower lying portion of the glade where a brook murmured through the long reeds, while a zebra bound to a tree close by gave vent to his feelings in a series of vicious kicks.

In the pathway leading to the opening lay a half-overturned caravan, which they were busily engaged in setting upright again, while a tall man in his shirt-sleeves was hauling along the inmates of the van. In one hand he led an immense tigress, while the other arm held four or five tiger cubs, clawing and scrambling up his shoulder, and miauing dismally all the time. The mother walked along contentedly, keeping her face turned towards her offspring, purring gently with her mouth half open.

Suddenly something came striding through the grass quite close to Lou and Zeppa, with a long bounding trot. It was an ostrich, on whose broad elastic back rode a little half-naked boy, his tiny hands clasped tightly round the bird's pole of a neck.

This was rather too much for Zeppa : out he leapt from his hiding-place, barking furiously, and made for the ostrich. The bird raced away with piercing trumpet cries ; the boy, thrown high in the air at every bound, screamed for help; Lou followed, shouting and scolding; and so the chase went on, round and round the encampment.

The dog reached the bird at length, sprang at it, and secured a great tail feather in his mouth. Fired by his success, he amused himself by springing again and again at the bird's back, and pulling out feather after feather, becoming more expert each time, and stealing more and more, regardless of the bird's shrill cries of pain. The costly feathers flew about, and the uproar became general.

They went at the villain, who by this time had got well into the spirit of the thing, with poles and whips—one woman even with a big cooking spoon. They chased him wildly round the cages, whose inmates joined in the already deafening

uproar, with roars and howls and furious leaps, till the cages rocked again, and the echoes sent back an answering chorus ; while high above the waving tree-tops the thunder rolled on its calm majestic way.

At last the Nubian managed to seize the dog just as he had got one of the finest plumes between his teeth, and most reluctantly gave up his prize, when Lou forced it from him by tugging and shaking. The others struck at him, while Lou warded off the blows with hand and shoulder ; and they might in the end have wreaked their vengeance upon him personally, had not the owner of the menagerie pushed his way through the crowd and come between them.

He was a short, sturdy man with a round red-brown face, short bristly grey hair, and fierce black beard. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up high, disclosing the great swelling muscles of his arms ; one of which was profusely tattooed on the inner side. In his hand he held a mighty thighbone, from which the meat had just been removed to be distributed to the animals, and which still shone moistly—a rather unusual style of sceptre.

He bade Lou give an account of himself : whence he came ?—whither he was going ?

Lou shrugged his shoulders and pulled a sorry

face. In his exclusive intercourse with the dog his small stock of language had diminished considerably, and the laconic *rien* had to do duty more than ever as an answer to any question that might be put to him.

But no sooner did he reveal in a good-natured and shame-faced smile the full splendour of his magnificent teeth, than his success was secured. It was instantly apparent to Signor Pimento's sharp business eye that here, with such teeth, was an opportunity for drawing an audience and creating a sensation which must not be allowed to slip.

He determined therefore, at all hazards, to secure this eccentric-looking tramp for his company. Seizing Lou by the arm, he coolly examined his muscles, and passed his hand over his chest. He discovered that, though the young man had undeniably fallen away very much during his wandering, vagabond life, he would soon fill out with good feeding for the purpose he had in view. He therefore ordered them to give *ce monsieur*, as he was pleased to call poor ragged Lou, something to eat.

"And lots of it, do you hear?" and he waved his sceptre in the direction of the steaming caldrons.

Lou understood that much. Something to eat ! and lots of it !—it was like the sound of wedding bells. A ray of joy lit up his face ; he pointed to the dog : “ hungry too—big hunger ! ”

Aware that the gigantic dog would show up well in the menagerie, Signor Pimento commanded that he too should be provided with a large quantity of food.

It was not long before Zeppa was engaged in discussing an enormous piece of meat which had been thrown to him ; besides which he had been presented with Signor Pimento’s sceptre, whereon, however, even his vast powers of crunching failed to make any impression, till he ended by dragging the refractory bone away into the bushes, there to rumin ate at his leisure on some more effectual mode of attack.

A little while later, and Lou was seated amongst the others with a heaped-up pewter plate before him. The loud smacking of his lips and the feats he achieved with his great teeth appeared to afford them unbounded pleasure. Signor Pimento urged him on as if he meant to fatten him up by that evening. The others followed their director’s example, till Lou almost despaired of putting away the good things which fell to him from all sides.

From time to time as he paused for breath his eyes travelled curiously round the assembly. Added to the satisfaction of appeasing his hunger, he had the comfortable feeling that the fortune of the road had thrown him into company which did not differ greatly from himself. There were brown weather-beaten men with thick-set bull-necks ; dark-haired, fiercely beautiful women, with bold masculine features and voluptuous forms, to the occasional baring of whose charms they showed a calm indifference ; pretty, half-naked, sturdily built children crawled about on all-fours amongst the dishes, plunging their little hands into this one or that as they caught sight of a tempting morsel.

The dresses, even in this state of *négligé*, showed all sorts of fantastic vagaries, reminding Lou of his old Oriental livery. The bright colours were certainly faded, the fringes draggled and matted, and the trimmings tarnished. One of the men wore a fez, another a spangled circlet ; on yonder swelling brown bosom glittered the broad links of a gaudy chain. Alas ! how it recalled the cascades of St. Cloud, and that flashing heart of which Lili had been so ashamed !

They made short work with the food, these people. Heavens ! what mouthsful they bolted !

They might have caught it from the wild beasts. Certainly Lou had no occasion to apologise for his appetite.

A few rather odd guests took part in the meal. The tigress was absorbed in tearing and worrying at a sinewy piece of meat, her satisfied purr serving as an accompaniment to the general conversation, while from this or that cage came a low cracking and crunching of bones. Close by, the five tiger cubs were gathered round a huge bowl of milk, their eager noses deep in it, sometimes an ungainly paw plumped into the middle of it, splashing over the whole little party.

There too sat a calm, sage-looking old gentleman, with the most elegant manners, Monsieur Jim the chimpanzee. He seemed to feel the cold, in spite of the warm winter coat—infinitely too large for him—which hung upon his shoulders. Every attention was paid him, and he appeared anxious to reprove their greedy manners by showing them with what breeding and grace really good monkey society partook of its meals.

The storm was passing over, the low roll of the thunder sounding faintly in the distance. One cloud had cast down a few heavy drops of rain, falling on the bare shoulders of the women and making them start and scream ; others hissing into

the hot dishes, whereat everybody cried out indignantly and shook threatening fists at the offending elements.

After the meal three of the women set to work to patch up the dishevelled ostrich. Zeppa had mauled him frightfully, and in such a condition, with great staring patches of bare skin, it would be out of the question to present him before any public. So they carefully collected the scattered plumes, and by sewing them on to those which remained, did their best to restore his vanished glory. They chatted and giggled, while the ostrich protested piteously against the whole operation ; and further off a musician practised on the horn the echoes trumpeting back at him from every side.

To the accompaniment of this music Lou's engagement was concluded, a one-sided agreement, in which Lou only dropped an occasional "yes" or nodded his head silently.

"Then you will stay with us—eh ?" said Signor Pimento, blinking his left eye—considerably smaller than the other—rapidly, and continuing to do so throughout the interview. "The Menagerie Pimento is *illistrissima* in all Europe, including America. It is the first, the greatest menagerie of the world ! You couldn't do better, *figlio mio !*"

Lou cast a glance at the considerable remains still on his plate, and could not forbear a smile of comfortable repletion.

"Your name is Lou, is it? Let us see—Lou . . . Lou . . . ;" and he pronounced the name in various tones to try how it sounded. "Lou is such a confoundedly short name—it's simply nothing. You might just as well call yourself A. or B., or I. or X. The name is so small, one would almost be afraid of losing it. You can make no impression with 'Lou,' *per Bacco!* nobody will catch on to a name like that—you would be ashamed of it before the animals. You must have another name. How do you like Aukadauba or Titirongolo, for instance?"

The Nubian stared in amazement and nodded.

"No offence, but it must be all one to you, with your dark skin, whether you are yellow or brown or black—*Dio di Dio!*—a matter of perfect indifference; so we will make you darker, *capisce?* That shade doesn't draw. You will have to be pitch black, or *realmente* I sha'n't be able to make any use of you."

Lou's eyes grew bigger, and he nodded again.

"No offence, *carino*, but I suppose it's all the same to you whether you've come from Africa or Australia or the moon? I require a savage—a

first-rate savage—a *bestia* of a savage!—*capisce?* I had a genuine one called Aukadauba, who'd eat a man as soon as a sandwich. Here, of course, he had to give up his favourite dish, because of the police; so he only ate live pigeons. Then he turned melancholy and died."

Lou did not understand half of it, and showed his teeth in a broad grin.

"*Sangue di Dio!* but you've got a *meraviglia* of a set of teeth in your mouth. You ought to make a perfect *furore* with them. You might be made for man-eating with those teeth. Only keep your mouth wide enough open. We'll soon show you how to eat live pigeons—*capisce?* It will be a splendid performance."

Lou nodded again.

"We'll teach you to swallow fire—a mere trifle, *figlio mio*—no hotter than your dinner yonder. Can you yell and howl and bellow—eh?"

Lou nodded with decision.

"Well, then, you must learn a war-cry. Monsieur Gingo shall take you in hand. The devil would be in it if he did not make a genuine cannibal of you. But look here, you know, you'll have to eat—you must stuff yourself thoroughly; you're no use in a show as you are now. You will have to eat all day long. Are you hungry still?"

Lou did not know what to make of this sudden change of fortune. Wonders would never cease !

"Do you agree to it all ?" asked Signor Pimento finally.

Lou's teeth flashed such a rapturous assent that there was no need of further words.

At that moment Zeppa came bounding along. Lou started up, hastened towards the dog, bent down, and casting his arms in a transport of joy about its neck—"Ah, Zeppa !" he cried, "good—all good. Zeppa have big dishes again, never go beg any more !"

At night Lou and his friend were shown to their bed in an empty caravan. As a covering he received a skin, old and shabby enough ; but he had no sooner felt it than he knew it was bear.

"Oh, Zeppa, Zeppa—bear-skin !" He stroked it tenderly—how it carried him back to the old days ! Oh, the comfort of stretching his worn-out limbs upon it ! He was to sleep once more on a bear-skin—happier times were in store for him, all would now be well !

CHAPTER IX.

MEMORIES.

NIGHT fell over the scene—black and sultry—full of mysterious magnetism ; and Lou could get no proper sleep, but woke again and again from his fitful slumbers. As the talking in the caravans died away, all kinds of other sounds began to steal forth out of the darkness and flit about like restless spirits.

The heavy, panting breath of the wild beasts rose and fell upon the air, varied now and then by suppressed snorts—here a sudden deep sigh, there a thin whistling whine.

Lou's caravan stood among the cages of the beasts of prey. He could hear the ponderous bodies changing their position in their sleep, with a tremendous heave—a yawn, a stretching of the limbs, and a heavy thud against the wall of the cage that made it creak and groan. He heard distinctly the rub of a hairy coat against the iron

bars ; claws being sharpened on the wooden floor ; then the tap-tap of slender little hoofs, and a bird of prey stretching its great wings with a whirr and rustle of feathers. Round and over all this confused murmur of animal sounds hovered the even, far-reaching voice of the forest ; loud and strong where it swept through the high tree-tops ; throwing off great waves of sound into the distance, dying away softly in the deeper glades ; while close by the little brook chattered over the pebbles in its bed, or gurgled and whispered as it glided through the long reeds.

A nightingale broke into song—a few wild seductive notes—a yearning *adagio* ; then silence once more, and nothing but the mighty rushing of the trees.

In the far distance Lou could hear the dogs bark in some neighbouring village—they scented the menagerie.

Suddenly some animal woke from its sleep with a hoarse angry cry. It was answered by another ; then growls with viciously accentuated R-r-r-s, and a sound of biting and snorting.

Two great eyes shone through the gloom with a greenish phosphorescent light ; then four more, from which sparks seemed to shoot ; and then the

phantom lamps were swallowed up in the blackness of the night.

As Lou lay there listening, between sleeping and waking, a scene of his childhood returned slowly to his memory, grew clearer, and then stood out distinctly before his mind's eye.

Another night than this—wider—limitless ; at an immeasurable distance stars glittered white and tremulous in the deep black vault of heaven. Men were stirring a fire with long poles—stirring so vehemently that the sparks flew high in the air as if to join the stars which flashed about them. The crackling flames cast a ruddy glow over the men's faces and their eyes gleamed.

And as they stirred they sent forth wild cries and shouts, sometimes drawing the poles out of the fire and shaking them menacingly into the darkness beyond with yells and threats. For round the fire, and evidently directed at it, there rose a chorus of infuriated howls. A hoarsely yelping crew raged round it in a circle, the ground quaking beneath the thunder of their trampling feet.

When the tumult grew too furious, a lighted brand would fly like a rocket into the seething mass of hungry beasts, leaving a trail of sparks behind it. The moon rose blood-red over the

horizon, growing and widening into an intense glowing disc, flooding the boundless wastes of stony desert with weird and lurid light.

The scene changed.

A closely packed troop of riders moved along in the glare and heat of the burning sun. The bronzed faces which peered from the folds of the white bernouses wore a grim, forbidding look ; an oppressive silence reigned, no word passed between the riders, no sound broke the stillness of the desert save the monotonous ring of the hoofs on the hard ground.

From time to time a woman's beautiful face, with great, dark, starry eyes, would lean over Lou with a whisper of tender words, such words as he had never heard since then.

Thus they went on for many hours through the quivering waves of heat. Then voices arose from the troop, a halt was made—a hasty, urgent consultation, and on again in hot haste, galloping at the top of their speed.

The child lay closely pressed to his mother's bosom, clinging tightly to her robe with his little hands as they pursued their wild flight. Then, a confused sound of fighting—shots fell ; yells and menaces rang out, the horses snorting fiercely, and Lou clinging ever tighter to his mother.

Suddenly, with a jerk and a sharp cry, her arms loosened from him ; there was a dizzy fall from a height, and something hot flowed over Lou's face and obscured his sight ; a rattle in the throat, a last gasping sigh, and the stricken mother lay still.

Soon afterwards rough hands seized the child and dragged him up, but not till the evening did strange women, speaking an unknown tongue, wash his mother's heart's blood from his weeping face.

From these fantastic visions, which had ended in lulling him to sleep, Lou was aroused by a blinding light flaring out several times and illuminating the whole glade. The storm had returned ; the thunder rolled over the forest, a mighty wind swept through the trees, whose branches creaked and clashed against one another.

All the animals in the encampment were awake, pacing their cages and growing more agitated every moment, rattling their chains and making the springs of the cages vibrate under their furious leaps and plunges. They shook the iron bars and threw themselves against the wooden walls as if to force an outlet through which they might flee from those maddening flashes. The pauses be-

tween the lightning grew shorter and shorter, and with each fresh flash the medley of terrified cries wrung from the animals grew worse.

It was a chaos of howls and yells and whines, audible in its shrillness above the sonorous voice of the thunder, while angry bellowings vied with it as it dealt its sudden crashing blows. Earth and sky joined in one terrific concert ; the penetrating trumpet-notes of some great bird piercing sharply through the all-pervading noise like a harsh tenor in a chorus.

Suddenly, with a rush, the rain came down, in a solid mass, with the metallic rattle of musketry.

At this new and unexpected phase the howling and bellowing was checked, and finally sank into complete silence. Nothing was heard but the steady rush of the rain and the mighty ebb and flow of the thunder.

Gradually, however, movement returned to the cages. The hyæna began gnashing his teeth—it sounded like the unearthly chattering of a maniac. A jaguar gave a horrible long-drawn hu-hu ; from the monkeys' cage opposite came whimpering, frightened, guttural cries ; and the jackal sniffed the air greedily. Now the foxes set up an angry yelp which let loose the whole chorus once more, as if at a given signal.

But this time there arose from the midst of the chaos a roar which dominated every other sound—the rain, the thunder, the other beasts.

It was the voice of the lion. What even the storm could not accomplish the lion's burst of rage achieved; everything trembled at it—the air, the earth, the van in which Lou was lying; and Zeppa, courageous Zeppa, cowered close to Lou, trembling so violently that he had to use every effort in order to calm the dog's excited nerves.

Then something occurred whereat Lou himself trembled.

The zigzag flashes had been so blinding, the changes from deepest night to dazzling brightness so abrupt, that Lou had hitherto been unable to distinguish anything beyond a medley of swaying, leaping animal outlines. Suddenly a blaze of lightning seemed to be arrested on the spot, and remained there stationary—an immense quivering glare of light—for several seconds.

By this light Lou saw that in one of the cages there stood a man. He was dressed in pale clothing, and his face gleamed lividly white in the glare of the lightning. He held a small whip in his uplifted hand, and his lips moved in speech. He was speaking to a coil of tigers who twisted

and writhed at the dazzling brightness of his form, at the power of his piercing eye and the magic of his voice.

One of the brutes made as if to spring : the man's eyes only opened a little wider,—one loud word followed like a blow—nothing more—and the creature growled and writhed again amongst its companions in the corner.

Then night again—deepest, blackest night.

But there was no danger for the man. They knew—those tigers and the other animals too—they knew that it was he who made the thunder and the lightning, and brought down the rain from heaven. That man could slay them with a glance—they knew it well !

CHAPTER X.

AUKADAUBA.

LOU showed a remarkable aptitude for his *rôle* of savage, and Signor Pimento was delighted with the lucky find chance had thrown in his way.

“*Vecchio mio*,” he said, patting Lou’s bare breast which Monsieur Gingo in his freest artistic style had just finished painting in exact imitation of tattooing; “*vecchio mio*, you committed an inconceivable folly in letting yourself be brought into the world as a simple Nubian. Just cast an eye at the glass, and say if this style does not become you ten thousand times better.”

No doubt the monstrous turban-like roll of hair stuck through with nodding gaudy plumes became him vastly, as far as he could judge from what he saw in the little three-cornered, half-blind scrap of looking-glass. Nor did the ingenious method with which they had attached a copper ring to his nose cause him any special inconvenience, and for a change he might easily put up with the darker

shade of his complexion—a brilliant metallic black which Mr. Gingo pronounced to be “super-genuine.”

“Of course, director, with such a groundwork of colour to go upon it’s a very different thing,” said the artist, sweeping back with a theatrical wave of the hand a dangling lock of grizzled hair which fell over his nervously mobile face. Because of this lock of hair and the odd “funeral” expression of his little slits of eyes, they had nicknamed him the “weeping willow.”

This name, however, was singularly inappropriate to the mercurial character of the factotum of the menagerie, himself the greatest and most genuine wonder amongst the marvels in which the Pimento company was so rich. He knew everybody and everything—he saw everything, he was simply everything. Not a nail had time to rust beneath his observant eye ; he portioned out the food for the animals, and brought up the wild cubs by hand ; he conducted the correspondence for the illiterate director, and arranged the announcements and programmes for printing ; his imagination was inexhaustible in the composing of designs for gigantic, screaming, coloured posters ; and without his calming influence the ear-piercing discords of the little orchestra would have been unbearable.

His reputation as an artist was, however, most loudly trumpeted abroad by the immense pictures painted on the outside of the show, representing scenes of combat dripping with gore in impossible landscapes. They all dated from the time when he, "an animal painter giving the greatest future promise," fell in love with an English lady, a lion-tamer. Thenceforth, painting and sighing, he had followed the fortunes of the menagerie, till the lady ran away with a most unromantic master-miller from Nîmes, and Signor Pimento put a stop to the scenes of carnage because "they used up too much canvas."

After that he devoted himself to "plastic art" by getting up artificial savages for the menagerie. A savage was an indispensable item in the Pimento show, whereby it surpassed all rivals by "the height of Chimborazo!" as Gingo's jargon went. Real savages, however, were generally difficult to procure, and often still more difficult to manage. "Bah! why worry yourself to death over such a pack of idiots!" said Mr. Gingo. "The devil would be in it, Signor Pimento, if I couldn't paint them up for you as real as life!"

His ideas for the production of artificial savages were composed partly of his recollections of original models, partly of vague notions gathered from odd

natural history books, and he shrank from no strong artistic measures in order to attain his ideal. Thus did he succeed in educating various worthy and fairly civilised people up to a passable degree of barbarity.

But never had Mr. Gingo achieved such a barbarian as this newest Aukadauba, formerly called Lou. On this occasion he had surpassed himself, not one of the twenty Aukadaubas had come anywhere near this "champion *Ai* production." Not even the last one, whom Signor Pimento in speaking to Lou had described as having died of melancholy, but who had in reality simply gone off with part of the cash. He was a locksmith's apprentice from Rouen, hoping to escape behind this black mask from his military duties, and who made himself extremely savage, especially when the red-coats were more than usually numerous amongst the audience.

Mr. Gingo was pleased to affect a becoming modesty. "Hang it all, who could help making something phenomenal with such raw material to work upon?" Then with a resounding slap on Lou's chest, "I just ask you now, look at that bronze! And feel this hair, firm as a mattress—eh? And those teeth! Did you ever see such a tongue as that fellow has got? And after the astonishing gibberish this gentleman manages to

talk—why, my Ginganese will be child's play to him."

Under Ginganese he understood a language of his own invention, a perfectly unintelligible mish-mash of inarticulate sounds in which his "system of training" for the career of a savage culminated.

"Give you my word, all the learned Professors in Europe will be breaking their teeth over this newest edition of Ginga."

For a time Lou was the most brilliant attraction of the show; thanks to Mr. Gingo's puffs, his fame cast even "the gigantic yawn-power" of the crocodile and the chimpanzee's "ludicrous likeness to man" in the shade.

Mr. Gingo was a master in the art of puff. If the interest of the public flagged, or they were slow to come in, it was his strident voice, outblaring the trumpets, which brought them in shoals to the ticket-office. The baits he threw out to them were so strong that even the wariest rose to them. With the dexterity of a juggler he let the dazzling words—extra, supra, prime, gala—scintillate before the eyes of the crowd. His superlatives had all the exhilarating effect of a burst of fireworks.

"Walk in, walk in, ladies and gentlemen! See the non-plus ultrrrr-ra of a wild man, Don Auka-

dauba Balala from Ginganesia ! Savage ! Savage !! Savage !!!” And after every word a resounding bang of the whip against the painted canvas ; or he would confound a peasant audience by shouting in authoritative tones and with a knowing twinkle of the eye, “ *Mundus vult de ci—pi !* ”

At first Lou displayed a childish delight in the performance. The others laughed to see the ardour with which he worked up his part. Giacometta, Pimento’s pretty little daughter, the wayward Puck of the company, “ died of laughing,” and spurred him on with “ That’s not ferocious enough—wilder, wilder yet, Monsieur Tatarati ! ”

Mr. Gingo was half annoyed : “ Hang it all, don’t spoil him. I am thankful he’s as savage as he is. The more savage he thinks himself the better. What are other people proud of—these men of a ‘ higher grade of civilisation ? ’ Why of a tab of coloured ribbon in their button-holes, of a meaningless little ‘ de ’ in front of their name.”

Lou’s savageness was almost too real. With a hideous hoo ! and hoo-ha ! he bounded from behind the curtain and advanced with terrific leaps to the edge of the platform, glittering and jingling and rattling in all the bravery of his costume. The gleaming teeth gnashed gruesomely between

the wide black lips, while he rolled his eyes and darted murderous glances at the audience.

Some of the foremost spectators fell back terror-stricken—women screamed, children began to cry. But these results only urged him on to further extravagances. He rushed madly about the little stage, his lance in rest as if to storm the audience ; or swinging his war-club round his head with force enough to lay all civilisation even with the ground.

To all this he kept up a running accompaniment of howls. A frightful uproar broke out in the cages ; all the animals howled and raged with him, driven to the verge of madness by Aukadauba's exciting gestures. It was a ghastly concert calculated to make the hearts of those present quake in their breasts.

Unfortunately, the most sensational point of the entertainment was missing. Lou steadfastly refused to perform a certain part of the traditional programme: he refused to bite off the heads of pigeons, whether alive or only stuffed to simulate life.

But why not ? Whence this fastidiousness, which even Mr. Gingo's powers of persuasion failed to remove? Was it a secret sense of shame which penetrated even the dark skin of this despised and down-trodden piece of humanity

—shame that he should even act a piece of brutality before an audience which claimed to rank so much higher in the human scale than he ever could?

Curious how this feeling first took shape. He had not refused to give it a trial. As he stood there, having conquered his first movement of repulsion and prepared to take the head of the bird between his teeth, his eye fell upon two casual spectators—Zeppa and Mr. Jim the chimpanzee.

Zeppa looked fixedly at him, turning his large, half-mournful, half-pleading gaze upon his friend, as if to restrain him from this unworthy deed. Something of that supernatural look was in his eyes which once before had terrified Lou by its suggestion of humanity. Jim the chimpanzee, too, stared at him with an old-fashioned, human expression, and just the ghost of an ironical smile on his elderly wrinkled features. Under the spell of the two pairs of eyes, Lou slowly laid down the pigeon.

No ; he was not going to sink so deeply into barbarism as to have a lower standard of the fitness of things than a dog or a monkey. No ; he would not pretend to be more of an animal than the beasts themselves—he would not eat live pigeons ! He would grin and gnash his

teeth as much as they liked, and howl till he roused the envy of the best howlers in the cages ; but he would not eat live pigeons.

Mr. Gingo was beside himself. "What ! teeth like that and refuse to do it ! It was a sin and a shame ! If I had such a prime set I would do nothing else all day but bite off heads. You have no idea what a sensation you will create. Now, don't you think you would get accustomed to it ? "

But Lou was firm.

Signor Pimento and Mr. Gingo could only marvel at the unaccountable fads of real savages. They had been deterred by no such delicate scruples on the part of Aukadauba's civilised predecessors.

However, they excused this affectation in consideration of the Nubian's brilliant qualifications, and cut out that part of the programme all the more readily, that with the co-operation of the dog they had arranged a perfectly new and sensational closing scene.

Zeppa proved himself an artist.

"He lays his part on rather thick," observed Mr. Gingo ; "but better too much of the savage than too little ;" and they let the dog alone.

He was scarcely to be held in till the end, Aukadauba's war-cries driving him to the verge of

madness. When, at length, he was let loose, he hurled himself at the audience, baying as if in a paroxysm of rage—hideously tricked out and disfigured by a fantastic mane of waving, jingling tags and ends. He tore about like a maniac, flew backwards and forwards with terrific bounds, his awful howls almost drowning Aukadauba's terrible war-chant.

The spectators asked each other in alarm how such a monster could be allowed at large. When they left the show and breathed again more freely, most of them trying to conceal the traces of their terror by an over-confident smile, all of them looking more or less bewildered, Mr. Gingo would rub his hands delightedly, while a knowing twinkle lit up his languid eye : “There’s naught so stupid as folk—eh, Master Lou ?”

Lou would laugh with all his thirty-two teeth, as he sought to calm the dog, still raging as if in justifiable wrath.

Yes, it was splendid, for once, with all his heart and soul, to make thorough fools of these people who had so often despised and trodden him under foot !

Zeppa, good old boy, took the matter decidedly too seriously and tragically.

One should only laugh at them, Zeppa ; laugh, that’s all—laugh !

CHAPTER XI.

"BECAUSE YOU ARE BLACK."

"QUIET, Zeppa! Zeppa, be quiet!"

Alas! no persuasion, no cajolery had any effect upon the dog now; a fierceness had come over him which set at naught all gentler methods of control. He had grown savage and quick-tempered, and even had dangerous fits of snappishness.

Lou was greatly concerned: did he understand the dog no longer, or did the dog purposely misunderstand him?

During Aukadauba's performance, Zeppa played his part more naturally each day—alarmingly so. A tone of real anger broke through his hoarse barking, and his howls outrivaled the furious utterances of the most untamed beasts in the menagerie. Lou expected every minute to have to restrain him from carrying his assumed character too far, and really attacking the audience;

the grounds for this anxiety becoming more and more real, both Pimento and Gingo expressed their misgivings as to allowing the dog to appear again in public.

Was it the life in the midst of wild beasts and the constant evidences of their untamed nature, but little controlled by whip and food, that had roused his blood to fever-pitch? Or had he taken Aukadauba's savageness for the real thing, and felt he must compete with him? For a dog ought surely to be wilder than a man. Or was Zeppa ashamed of his part? Did he think it beneath the dignity of any decent dog, or was perhaps ashamed for Lou, ashamed in his stead—the animal for the man? Lou brooded deeply over it, and wondered what it could possibly mean.

Mr. Gingo said once, "The beast got too much meat—it excited him; they had better reduce his portions."

But at this Lou flew into a terrible passion: "What! they would starve Zeppa!"

They reassured him; but thenceforth the Nubian kept a jealous watch upon them, lest in the distribution of food Zeppa should go short.

"Lou is savage enough by himself," said the

others ; " there won't be much difficulty in persuading the public that this Aukadauba is the genuine article."

There was some truth in the remark ; like Zeppa, Lou, too, was changed. His success as Aukadauba had roused the Nubian's ambition, and the sharply acrid fumes of the menagerie, which he breathed all day, seemed to rise to his brain and make him thirst for new and far other triumphs.

A longing kindled in him, and grew to be a fierce desire, that he might venture something great, unheard of—something really dangerous, under the shadow of death as it were. It must be grand and glorious to be gazed at as a hero, in wonder and admiration, like Signor Farmilli, the lion-tamer, who put his life at the mercy of the wild beasts several times a day. One false movement, one glance omitted, one touch of physical weakness, or an unexpected outburst of temper in one of the animals, upsetting all previous calculations, and he was lost !

Yet day after day the man slipped in through the narrow barred doorway, and stood before the beasts, upright and commanding, armed only with the power of his eye, and directing their movements with a turn of his slight whip. Woe to him,

if it should ever occur to one of them to doubt that this was the man who could call down the terrors of the storm from heaven, who with the lightning of his glance and the thunder of his voice was able to crush every living thing within his reach !

Ah, Lou ! Lou ! if thou couldst but stand so once, only once, and feel all the fire and the rapture of the high consciousness of command—oh, for one short minute to be a god ! Thus might much of the ignominy of thy dark life be blotted out ; then, perhaps, thou mightest dare to call thyself a man amongst thy brother-men, in spite of thy dusky skin !

Lou felt that Farmilli despised him for lowering himself to play the fool as he did, just as the grave, taciturn man rebuked Gingo's blatant charlatanism with his silent contempt.

Once only had Farmilli expended any words on Lou. He had come across him as Lou was leaving the stage. "Pity for such a handsome lad !" he murmured, as if to himself, with a rapid blinking of the eyelids.

Farmilli lived his own life, and took very little notice of anybody but his beasts. He was a man of middle height, thick-set, with a remarkably small head set on the top of very broad shoulders

The face with its olive colouring had the set, immovable look of a bronze cast. Only in the eyes, which embraced a wide range of vision, there glowed a dark fire, ready at any moment to burst into devouring flames. His head was always covered by a plain round cap, because one side of his scalp had been badly torn by the claws of a young tiger and now bore an ugly scar. The thumb of the left hand was missing, but he always carried his whip in that hand ; the right arm being partially paralysed by a bite from a jaguar. There was a certain distinguished repose in all his movements ; he scarcely spoke except to his animals, but with them he could be very eloquent. No man had ever seen a smile on those clear-cut lips.

Farmilli came from the province of Piacenza, where so many lion-tamers come from. It would have been difficult to guess his age ; judging from certain eccentric ways he had which contrasted oddly with his occupation, one would have taken him to be very young.

For years he had been betrothed to a pretty, well-to-do girl in his native place, and he employed a considerable portion of his spare time in writing endless letters to her—moving, fiery love-letters. Or rather he painted them, for the lines crept along

but slowly, full of carefully formed, uncouth letters, and it required many a day before such a work of art was ready for the post. He often destroyed what had cost him so much labour to put together, with far from perfect writing materials, too.

The others who saw him write had no idea of what it was that drove him to wield so difficult a weapon as the pen. He had now been betrothed some years, but the wedding had been put off again and again because he could not bring himself to part from his beloved beasts, which he had promised to do in that event.

Alas ! two passions tugged at his good honest heart ; on one side the love for his absent sweetheart, on the other an almost unholy passion for his profession ; here the sweet fetters that bound him to the girl, there the magic toils in which his animals held him. Thus a constant warfare went on in his breast under which he suffered severely, and which he was best able to keep down by fighting it out in his clumsy literary exercises.

Without doubt the lion-tamer held Lou in contempt, but on Zeppa he lavished all the kindness of which he was capable. Did he pity the dog because it was being degraded and its noble nature warped through the ridiculous rapacity of mankind ?

Zeppa seemed to appreciate Farmilli's high-toned, independent manner, and showed himself very susceptible to his attentions. The wise creature observed—made comparisons; here the real true hero placing himself in fearful urgent danger, with eye inspired and heart full of the joy of combat—there the painted puppet taught to frighten people with an artificial ferocity.

He compared and made a distinction. Lou felt it, and the dog began to show more and more plainly how much he was attracted to the lion-tamer.

It gnawed at Lou's heart; it held his every thought fast as in a vice.

The dog lay at his feet, his head lying heavy on his outstretched paws. Lou spoke to him, pouring out before the dog all the love and all the tenderness which filled his heart, his voice trembling with eagerness and sorrow. The hound never moved—did not seem to hear.

Did Zeppa love him no longer!

Then an anxious, beseeching whisper, "Zeppa not love Lou now?" His voice broke as if arrested by a flood of tears.

Zeppa raised his eyes—not those eyes before whose gaze, that time when he had beaten the dog, Lou had fled as from a suddenly confronting

conscience. Now they gazed at him in unutterable sadness, that was pity gleaming in their moist depths.

The hound pitied him ! And if something did not occur to prevent it, soon, very soon, that pity might—nay, must—turn to contempt.

Had it all been for nothing, all the trouble and misery, the hunger and bitter humiliations they had endured together ?

The fear was upon him once more, the terrible fear that he might lose Zeppa. But this time not by any sudden catastrophe—not by man's rude hand ; no—he himself was thrusting the dog from his former place, slowly closing his heart's door upon him.

Lou resolved to reconquer the animal's respect with one decisive blow. He openly declared that he would no longer play Aukadauba.

"What? Why? He must be mad! Did he want a higher salary?"

"No, not that," said Lou; and he gave Pi-mento and Gingo to understand that he was ashamed of it—that to act the part of a savage went against his nature. Hesitating and reluctant, he brought out the real reason at last: "Zeppa not like to be savage any more."

Ah, ha! so the dog was at the bottom of it!

The whole menagerie would have to give way to this wonder of wonders next, they supposed. They hardly saw at first how he could have come to this determination, but they knew, they could not fail to see, what a positively uncanny influence the animal exercised over this queer specimen of mankind.

They had long detested Zeppa on account of his fierce, unruly ways, and would have put him on the chain long ago if Lou had not been so set against it.

" You must be quite mad, Lou ! " cried Mr. Gingo. " What are you ashamed of ? Go to any of the Imperial or Royal and other Zoological Gardens where they exhibited curious people—not half so valuable as you—beside the wild beasts. You will see then whether it is not considered an honour to be shown as a savage."

Signor Pimento, however, burst in angrily : " Very well, then, *vecchio mio*, you know where you came from ; good—*addio*, but not à rivederci!"

Lou started : they were showing him the door, then—him and Zeppa ; and outside it hunger and misery were on the watch for them to swallow them up.

He bethought himself and agreed to stay, but

Zeppa was not to appear again in public—not on any account.

But that was just what the other two had long wanted. He had better put his precious Zeppa under a glass case!

So Aukadauba appeared without the dog.

But this was only a half measure; the hound demanded more. It looked as if he were breaking away wholly from Lou's influence; Farmilli's power over the animal increased rapidly. Him only would it obey, and he it was who managed to hush up or prevent many of its delinquencies in the menagerie. It was no wonder that the man who could subjugate the beasts of the wilderness by his glances should succeed in bending the fine intelligence of this dog to his will.

At last Lou could bear it no longer. One morning he went up to Farmilli, who was engaged in conversation with Essed, the majestic flowing-maned lion from the Cape.

"Moussou," began Lou timidly.

"Very good," continued Farmilli to the lion, "we will order a couple of tender cutlets for your Majesty." It had pushed one paw through the bars, and Farmilli stroked the golden brown fur.

"Moussou——"

The lion grunted with pleasure, and in the

black ball of his foot the points of his claws twitched in and out playfully.

"Lou go in there—Lou not be afraid, Moussou." Farmilli turned his head slightly with a quick side-glance at the speaker's face.

"Lou like Essed—Lou go in to Essed ; Lou not afraid."

"What do you want?" Only the tone showed surprise, not a muscle moved in the lion-tamer's face. Then without looking at Lou, his head slightly on one side, his eyes still fixed on the lion, he said : "You want to go into Essed's cage—beside that lion?"

Lou nodded with decision.

"What are you thinking of? You can't play tricks with an old gentleman of that sort—can one, Essed?"

Essed opened his jaws in a yawn, slowly stretching them wider and wider—a terrific chasm, showing the rough and prickly tongue.

There was a pause. When Farmilli spoke again, it was in the clear, metallic ringing tones he was wont to use to the animals during the performance. "You are not afraid?" he asked.

The lion-tamer's eyes were fixed on Lou's face, boring themselves in, holding him fast as under a spell, darting their lightnings into the innermost

recesses of his soul. No lie, no dissembling, was possible under that gaze.

"Not afraid," answered Lou. His eyes flashed.

"Very well, we will try it at once. Come with me."

The eyes never left Lou's face, watching for the slightest quiver that might indicate a trace of fear. But the face remained unmoved as if cast in bronze.

They went up to one of the cages in which two young lions were rolling over one another in play. Farmilli struck his whip against the bars, and they sprang at them, open-mouthed and growling.

"We will go in here, Signor," said Farmilli. He pointed the lions to a corner with his forefinger. Unwillingly, with long, undulating, cat-like movements, they retreated into it.

"But consider well, Signor, that there is a great difference between the paltry frightening of silly people and being able to command the obedience of these animals. One must love them, really love these creatures, if one is to govern them. One can seldom love human beings, you know. Now come along!" And Farmilli stuck the key in the little side-door of the cage. But he did not open it; he stopped, turned round, and his eyes beamed with a kindly light.

" You are courageous, Signor," he said with an affectionate tone in his beautiful sonorous voice. " You are brave ; I am glad of that. Look you, I wanted to put you to the test. But we cannot go in there, I dare not let you ! "

Lou stared at him blankly.

" Why not ? Well, *because you are black*. Don't be hurt, the animals have no regard for a black man. Something disastrous would happen. Don't be offended, but it is so. And have men any regard for you ? Look how they trample upon you and ill-treat you, and count you lower than the beasts ; and yet you are a man like them, and like them made in the image of God, as they boast in their arrogance. Ah, these men ! these men ! "

Lou stared at the lion-tamer ; he tried to stammer something, but failed ; his head sank upon his breast.

" Don't take it so much to heart," said the other to comfort him. " Perhaps we will try it some day after all. You have such famous teeth, maybe if you were to show them at the animals——"

" But you should show them at people too, do you hear ? Show them well ! " he called after him as the poor fellow stumbled blindly away.

Lou flung himself across Zeppa's broad back and there fought out his agony.

"Because you are black." Of all the lion-tamer had said to him, that alone he had understood. Because he was black—no respect, no love, no rights, no pity, no hope, no joy—because he was black!

Did Zeppa, too, despise him for that? Zeppa licked the Nubian's fevered, burning brow lovingly.

Ah, Zeppa is better than the rest; Zeppa would not despise him!

CHAPTER XII.

THE DINNER-PARTY.

IT was at the fair at St. Mâlo that Pimento gave a dinner-party in the menagerie. It arose out of a joke; a porcupine had come to grief and had to be killed, whereupon Monsieur Gingo declared it would make a very excellent dish. The others laughed, seeing how the creature bristled with quills.

“Leave it to me,” said Gingo, tossing back the weeping willow locks from his face, “and I’ll engage to cook you a dish which you might search all the restaurants in Paris for in vain.”

“It’s a pity there are not more of us,” said Madame Criardeau derisively. She had a ready tongue, and trained the parrots and other small deer.

“We shall have to invite some more people, or we shall never get through it,” remarked the wrinkled old monkey-keeper, pulling out some of the quills as playthings for his chimpanzees.

"The Giantess next door must not miss it," they continued.

"Nor His Tinyness Admiral Tom Turtle, as a pendant to her."

"How jolly! What splendid fun!" cried Giacometta, clapping her little hands; and she teased her papa till he was obliged to give in to everything.

"You may invite the Marionettes from opposite, for all I care," he grumbled.

So invitations were issued to the neighbouring shows, and there was much serious consultation as to whether offence would be given if this or that company was not invited; the Menagerie Pimento did not wish to lay itself open to reproach on the score of good-fellowship. Doubts were entertained, however, about the proprietor of the "Monster Ox," a little fussy blatant fellow who made more noise over his wonder of an animal—quite an ordinary piece of cattle, between ourselves—than ten menageries put together. Ah, bah! the Menagerie Pimento could afford to be generous!

It was late in the evening; the day's work was over for the drums and trumpets and the hoarse voices of the showmen; only the great barrel-organ of the carrousel still piped and trilled its

monotonous tunes into the mild summer night, and far away in the distance sounded the wash of the in-coming tide.

Part of the tent roof was rolled back, allowing the star-spangled sky to look down into the dim, yellow twilight of the menagerie, but feebly lighted up by smoking oil-lamps.

In the middle stood the tables, made up of an assortment of cases, planks and poles, the divergencies in their height being too great to be concealed by the table cloths of varied shades of white with which they were covered. The dinner service too was very mixed, the menagerie's collection of dishes—none too well matched to begin with—having been supplemented by loans from the neighbouring tents and wine-stalls. No one plate matched another, and the glasses in particular were remarkable for a fine diversity in shapes and size. But Mr. Gingo, who arranged it all, declared that it was just this want of sameness which gave the genuine artistic character to the entertainment.

Pimento's vest shone in dazzling whiteness, and fat Madame Pimento's red silk dress rustled and gleamed to such an extent that it excited the attention of the animals, accustomed as they were to strong effects. Giacometta sported the many coloured, spangled fancy costume in which she

usually graced the ticket-office, her merry black eyes flashing like diamonds.

The first to arrive was the proprietress of the great Tombola booth, at the sign of the "Seven Wonders of the World," an old acquaintance. Like Madame Pimento, she was stout and remarkable for a heavy moustache and a powerful bass voice which dominated every fair.

"She might have left her two-franc necklace at home," Madame Criardeau whispered cuttingly to the other ladies; "she's got a regular peal of bells round her neck."

At the same moment the owner of the "Greatest Panorama in the World" stumbled in, with his wife on his arm; he very bland, very smiling, with a famished-looking face and shabby clothes; she, a maypole, with great goggle eyes, reminding one of the glasses of her own panorama.

"B'jour, Monsieur! B'jour, Madame!" screeched a parrot in very distinct tones.

Madame Pimento was extremely annoyed; she had intended to be very reserved towards these people, and now the stupid parrot must needs go and spoil it all. They should not have been invited—the "Greatest Panorama in the World" was very shaky on its feet, after all, and had scarcely any custom.

She nodded to them with the carelessly lofty air with which she was wont to greet the second circle people on a half-price day.

The wife proceeded at once to glare into the cages, till the animals started up in alarm at her glassy round eyes.

The curtain was now pushed aside for a portly and most distinguished-looking personage in a tail-coat and white necktie, who made his first bow on the top step, and then tripped down with dainty and elastic tread to repeat it ceremoniously, first before Madame Pimento, and then before Monsieur.

"Ah, Professor, delighted to see you!" said Pimento, winking his left eye nervously. Madame's curtsey rustled deep into the stiff silken folds of her brilliant dress.

This was the "Hall of Magic and World-renowned Institute of Apparitions and Chiro-mancy," represented in the person of the great Professor Blaginsky, necromancer in ordinary to several European Courts.

More than one coloured ribbon figured in his button-hole, and his smooth-shaven, bluish countenance wore the condescending smile of the successful diplomatist.

Observing these ceremonious greetings, Jim the chimpanzee could restrain himself no longer, and,

greatly impeded in his progress on two feet by his heavy winter cloak, tottered up to the distinguished guest, bowed solemnly and held out his hairy hand. The Professor returned the bow, as if it were quite in the usual order of things, in the same portly manner with which he had greeted the Pimentos; everybody laughing except the Professor and Jim, who took the matter perfectly seriously.

Other guests followed and the place began to fill, but conversation certainly languished. Each separate firm held watchfully aloof from the rest, the petty jealousy of competition preventing any freedom of intercourse, while here and there frankly hostile glances showed a state of open warfare. They looked at the animals, less from interest or curiosity than embarrassment; they tried to make friends with the chimpanzee, even going so far as to tease him, which the old gentleman took extremely ill. The parrots kept up an incessant nasal chatter, and favoured the company with a piercing selection from their conversational stock. From the open-air kitchen close by came the sound of fizzling and bubbling, while a greasy smell of frying filtered through the canvas and mingled with the penetrating odours of the menagerie.

A whole group of guests now burst in. They

were in the highest spirits—you could hear them laughing and whooping from afar. It was “The Great International Shooting Gallery,” with four of the “First Beauties of Europe.”

A Norwegian ship’s captain, who had dropped considerable sums of money each day, partly at the shooting gallery, partly for champagne in company with the “First Beauties of Europe,” led in two of the ladies, or, more correctly speaking, had to be led by them owing to the unsteadiness of his gait. Behind them the owner of the shooting gallery, likewise tipsy, tumbled in with two more ladies, and—could it be possible?—he was in his shirt-sleeves. One of the ladies carried his coat over her arm.

To such a supper—and in shirt-sleeves! Was that a way to behave!

Madame Pimento was furious. “That’s what comes of asking every rag, tag, and bobtail in the place.” However, as hostess, she must control her feelings; she merely concentrated all her wrath in one annihilating glance which she hurled at her husband.

The excessively bare gleaming shoulders of the ladies excited much remark, their trains whirled up the dry dust underfoot. Madame Criardeau pronounced the whole thing to be *très fort!*

But this was not all. Two more hangers-on of the shooting gallery, young fashionables from the neighbouring Dinard, peered grinning through the curtains to see if they might venture to join the party. Madame Pimento pretended not to see them, turning her broad back upon them. And whom had they finally to thank for their invitation? Why, none other than Jim. He stole up the steps unobserved, offered his hand with much solemnity to each gentleman, and so saved the reputation of the house for hospitality.

Everybody laughed ; Signor Pimento more than any one, on purpose to spite his wife, who, crimson with fury, would have liked to lock the monkey up.

Suddenly, in the midst of the hubbub a tragic apparition, like a spirit form conjured up by Professor Blaginsky—Miss Nala Dajamante, the celebrated Indian Serpent Queen—stood before them. Noiseless as her own serpents she must have glided in, and now stood in all her sylph-like slenderness, drawn to her full height, her arms crossed upon her bosom in token of greeting, her lustreless eyes gazing vaguely forth from the thick veil of waving hair which nearly concealed her features. They hardly knew how to receive her, and thought they had better place her beside good old Lou at table.

"Nasty fellow!" shrieked a parrot. "Nasty fellow!" and he grew quite ungovernable with rage.

There was another roar of laughter, for who should appear at that moment but the proprietor of "The Monster Ox of the World," a little shrivelled person with a cross-grained face, in which the features were for ever on the move; the furrows in his brow, the mouth, the nostrils; the moustache drawn out in two threads at mathematical right angles with his nose; even the shoulders twitched nervously.

"Nasty fellow!" The man, taking this peculiar greeting to himself, was on the point of turning back. Signor Pimento had to bring him in by main force. "You had much better have let him go," hissed the infuriated Directress.

Two voices were audible outside—a rough contralto trying to persuade a thin, piping soprano. It refused—no, it would not, could not go in. How could a giantess be so bashful? "She was frightened, really she was so frightened, of the wild beasts!"—poor little thing.

She appeared at last. The wooden steps groaned under the vast burden of this three-hundred-weight of human flesh. The whole party was taken by surprise, for only a few had seen

this wonder in her own show-room. Jim, who had been crouching near the entrance, on the watch to receive any new-comers, glared up at her, made a terrified grimace and fled away on all-fours, leaving his mantle behind him.

Mademoiselle Cordula's pretty childish face flushed up to the roots of her flaxen hair, and her beautiful azure blue eyes gazed timidly down upon the assembled company.

Why could she not get over this foolish habit of blushing! Her proprietress, a dark and resolute lady with manly fists and brusque address, had long been in despair over the fact that the young giantess could not be brought to adopt the manner suited to her extraordinary bulk. Mademoiselle Cordula found it harder than ever to repress this unfortunate weakness when in moving before an audience she felt her huge form quaking and tottering beneath her.

"Ah, the gaping show was no place for her; why had they not left her in her quiet village!" she lamented often enough.

"When *le bon Dieu* has stuffed and padded anybody as He has you, you ought to be able to show yourself as coolly and as unconcerned as a rhinoceros," her manageress as often retorted.

That lady now positively drove her before her

into the tent. The Pimentos received her most affably. Ah, these curious eyes staring up at her! Measuring the vast circumference of her bare arms, revelling in the sight of her billowy white shoulders, never before had she appeared before such a professional audience. The "First Beauties of Europe" had difficulty in restraining the Norwegian captain from "making sure for himself," as he expressed it.

"Pray do not forget where you are, gentlemen!" observed the severe voice of the Directress from out the circle surrounding the giantess.

It was like a prearranged programme, in which each part was to outvie the one before. For now His Excellency Admiral Tom Turtle arrived. Where? Why, there, in the arms of a corpulent and extremely heated lady, another giantess serving as a foil to the dwarf.

With much excited trampling the little man disengaged himself from the cloak which had concealed him from the gaping crowd as he came along, and with a self-satisfied smirk nodded his large, wrinkled dwarf's head at the company. No one could reproach him with shyness, he was not in the least ashamed of his size. He offered his little withered hand all round, shaking it so vigorously that his whole body wagged with

it, and was never at a loss for an appropriate remark.

He requested to be put down from the arms of his conductress. She took the miniature arm-chair which she carried in the other hand, set it on the table, and helped the little fellow into it. There he sat among the salad and *compôte* dishes, in his trim little uniform, with all the self-possession of a great personage, glancing his eye in a business-like manner over the table, as if it were a ship which he in his quality of admiral was going to navigate through an ocean of dangers.

With firm, assured step, a man with a long, grey, waving beard now entered. Nobody knew him. He touched his hat slightly, said nothing, took no notice of anybody, took everything for granted, and made himself quite at home. The Directress tried in vain to put him down with one of her crushing looks. "It was high time to begin," she remarked to Pimento, "or there would be more of these Marionettes falling on them from the skies."

Two gendarmes looked through the curtains with a semi-official air. "Better ask them in," said Pimento, just to aggravate his wife.

One of the first to seat themselves at the table was the Unknown, whom nobody had invited.

The Professor was given the place of honour between the Pimentos, Jim had already placed himself comfortably at the other end, from whence he watched with the utmost composure the struggles of the others in arranging themselves. There was an evident paucity both of seats and covers, and they had to send round hurriedly in the neighbourhood to borrow table requisites. And as to the seats, why they could easily crush together a little.

An ordinary chair not being considered strong enough for "the biggest lady of the universe," they pushed in a heavy case for her which looked remarkably like a cage; for the fun of the contrast, Admiral Tom Turtle was to be her neighbour, so they placed his chair on the case beside her.

In her thoughtful way, Giacometta had taken special trouble about a cover for his Excellency. "He would be sure to like a child's knife and fork."

But his Excellency was very much put out at the idea, and they had to change it as quickly as possible "He can get into awful tantrums, the little toad," remarked his corpulent proprietress.

Offence was given in another quarter as well; as luck would have it, the "Monster Ox" had

come to be seated between one of the gendarmes and the chimpanzee. It was too bad ; here was a second insult. He finally revenged himself by falling upon the food like a beast of prey.

Lou was to have sat next Miss Nala Daganante, but somehow or other Farmilli had got between them. This gave occasion for fresh merriment ; he would be able to keep these two wild beings in order, they said, and prevent mischief. All three sat in dead silence, only the lion-tamer kept a sharply observant eye on the whole party, without ever turning his head.

The " International Shooting Gallery " opposite to these three was all the more boisterous by contrast ; the drolleries of the captain and the side-splitting witticisms of the two *galants* from Dinard keeping the ladies in an uninterrupted roar of laughter ; charming music fluttering in airy roulades and shrill bell-like notes above the muffled conversation of the eaters.

The animals had remained pretty quiet, only the monkeys were knocking one another about with guttural cries ; but they were none of them asleep, you could see their phosphorescent eyes gleaming through the bars. A tigress stood upright on her hind-legs, her paws pressed against the iron bars, her glittering yellow eyes wandering

in jerks and with a curious fixity of vision from one part of the table to another.

The first courses were over. A movement swept along the guests. *The dish was coming.* The porcupine! The roasted triumph of the evening!

Every eye was fixed upon the entrance, an expectant smile on every face. The captain informed them loudly of all the curious dishes he had partaken of in different quarters of the globe: scrambled serpents' eggs, alligator stew, and the wings of the flying dog soaked in oil, which tasted exactly like artichoke.

"The porcupine! Hurrah! Here it comes!"

Mr. Gingo stood at the entrance. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his hair hung in heavy tufts over his heated face, which shone with grease from the fumes of the cooking. But his eyes sparkled with conscious triumph. In his hand he bore a deep dish, in the centre of which the brown back of the roast appeared from out a thick and steaming gravy. The animal's quills were grouped round the dish in the form of a halo.

There was a general exclamation; they all wanted to see the wonderful dish, and crowded round Mr. Gingo.

Gently—it should be passed round. Then with a smirk of perfect satisfaction, as if he had achieved the greatest triumph of his life, Mr. Gingo handed round the porcupine.

They laughed at its size. "But it's genuine—extremely genuine!" cried Gingo; and everybody should have a share, that he could guarantee as thoroughly experienced carver to the menagerie.

The smell of the roast and the laughing and noise of the guests had roused the animals from their repose. The hyæna sniffed furiously through the bars, and the wolves leaped over one another in feverish excitement. Presently came the jaguar's long-drawn howl—it was the signal for a general uproar.

To this ghastly accompaniment of squealing, barking, howling, and roaring the *pièce de résistance* was consumed. His Highness the venerable Essed alone disdained to add the thunder of his voice to this chorus. Dignified, majestic, his head with its magnificent mane a little raised, his slightly curved forepaws stretched out in front of him, he sat there gazing with a touch of sovereign contempt in his golden-brown eyes at the silly ways of these paltry beings.

Mademoiselle Cordula trembled with fright,

and the Admiral took upon himself to reassure her. Indeed, he made himself extremely agreeable to the lady, and took every opportunity of drawing his chair a little closer to his neighbour's bare shoulder. It was droll to see with what a lover-like glance his little blinking grey eyes wandered over the snowy expanse of those shoulders.

The combined noise from people and animals grew so outrageous, that one of the gendarmes began to have official doubts as to whether he ought to permit such goings on at such an hour, but his companion reassured him with a contemptuous shrug.

When the tumult had somewhat subsided, Professor Blaginsky arose and delivered himself of a speech, which he accompanied by much facial expression and graceful dramatic action of his heavily beringed hands, reminding one of his manner in the Hall of Magic. Nobody clearly understood what he was talking about, and as he entangled himself deeper and deeper in a labyrinth of bombastic phrases, the International Shooting Gallery broke out at ever shorter intervals into applause, till at last the remains of the speech were swallowed up in a general roar of Bravo! and Vivat!

The "Monster Ox" could restrain himself no longer; he, too, would make a speech. He tapped on his glass, but nobody heard. He tapped louder—this was, of course, another intentional slight; they were determined not to let him speak.

He waved his hands wildly in the air, till Monsieur Jim came to his assistance and smote the glass till it rang again.

He took a deep breath and began, flinging about him with the biggest terms he could find, fell into a frenzy, and let loose a perfect tempest of words. He shook his fists in the air, his actions growing more and more heated as if they caught fire at the lightning play of his eyes.

The gendarmes listened with increasing attention and expressive glances at one another, one of them nearly plucking his moustache out by the roots with the fierceness of his twirling. What! This man was talking politics, even had the audacity to laud the Republic—here, in the heart of the Empire!

In another minute things would have come to a crisis, when suddenly the parrot came out with his "Nasty fellow! Nasty fellow!" again.

There was a great guffaw of laughter; the "Monster Ox," as Madame Pimento designated him

simply, had to sit down, and for some time afterwards threatened to choke with rage, but ended by devoting himself to pouring vast quantities of wine down his throat.

The conversation turned upon the giantess, and they disputed about her height and weight ; some of them declaring that they had seen others who weighed a great deal more.

Mademoiselle Cordula sighed. Ah, how gladly would she not have parted with a hundredweight ! Both the proprietress of the Tombola and of the Admiral boasted that they, too, might have exhibited themselves as giantesses had they wished to ; the Captain retorting with great difficulty that he would not have given five centimes to see them. Madame Pimento was complimented, too, on her dimension. The " International Shooting Gallery " laughed consumedly at some of the comments made at their end of the table, till the ladies, gasping for breath, declared they could laugh no more.

What was Jim up to ? He had slowly left his seat, and now his little ancient face appeared beside the big round head of the Admiral. He had not yet had the pleasure of greeting his Excellency, and with infinite decorum he held out his hairy hand. But when he came to feel the tiny

withered hand in his own abnormally long fingers, he started ; stay—he surely had a child to deal with here. He accordingly began to gently stroke and pat the little creature, as he was in the habit of doing to children ; he, the three-year-old monkey, fondling the man of forty, even going so far as to touch his face.

This, however, was rather too much for his Worship, who had taken it good-naturedly enough till now. Another scene was impending when, with a piercing scream, Miss Cordula sprang to her, feet dragging a good piece of the tablecloth with her, so that the dishes rolled and clashed together.

What was the matter ? Had the monkey attacked her—was some animal loose under the table ?

With a gesture of horror she pushed away the case on which she had been seated, quite regardless, in her terror, of the fate of the Admiral, whose chair beginning to sway, the little gentleman must inevitably have had a very considerable fall, for one of his size, had not Jim caught him in his long arms.

“ Ah-ha ! the fowls ! the fowls ! ” Giacometta was the first to discover it, and nearly expired with laughter. Through the wooden bars of the

case on which the young giantess had been sitting, they now saw the curved beaks picking about, and the birds began to cackle loudly. Nobody could blame the giantess for her alarm. For some time she had noticed a suspicious movement under the seat, when all at once the sharp beaks had pecked at her legs.

Who in her place would have sat still? The ladies shrieked at the bare thought of such a surprise; no, really, somebody must search under the table thoroughly. In a menagerie all sorts and conditions of animals might be creeping about that were not shown for money.

Everybody wanted to look at the fowls, there was a general rising and mixing of the company. The ladies refused to sit down till every seat had been overturned. Professor Blaginsky was accused of having spirited in the case and the birds. Oh yes, of course it was he; he would bewitch them all presently. The Professor received the accusation with a conscious smirk.

At that moment, several baskets were dragged in from which peeped silvery champagne corks.

“From whom?” “Who had sent for that?” The Directress flared up angrily. “The Captain! Long live the Captain!” shouted the Shooting Gallery. The Norwegian had sworn throughout

the evening that he would drown the whole menagerie in champagne—beasts and all. “Well, I can’t help it,” said Madame Pimento with feigned reluctance: she loved champagne as her life.

The strong wine loosened their tongues—some of them very soon lost their heads altogether. Framilli’s face grew darker by degrees; they should have kept that devil’s drink out of the menagerie, he observed on occasion.

He kept a sharp watch around him, as if he feared some disaster. The attention of the company was directed towards the animals now; he did not like it. Here and there they were beginning to tease them.

The owner of the Monster Ox, who had gathered a laughing, sarcastically applauding audience round him to listen to his braggart eloquence, loudly proclaimed the whole lion-taming business to be humbug, and offered without further ado to enter any one of the cages. “These great cats were as mild as lambs.”

“I can assure you, gentlemen, there’s more spirit in my ox than in the whole pack of these animals put together.” He rose, staggered up to one of the cages, and was proceeding to tickle a tiger’s paw which lay against the bars,

He was arrested by a voice which rang out clear and sharp as metal. It was Farmilli, who had risen to his feet, his eyes flashing, and who commanded the man to leave the beasts alone, instantly.

There followed a storm of applause. How splendid the lion-tamer looked ! how strong and imposing in the midst of the swaying stammering crowd ! firm and defiant as a lighthouse sending its piercing beams across a chaos of raging waters.

A performance ! They must have a performance. They would see and admire Farmilli in his cage. The wild beast in them was aroused ; they clamoured to see something prodigious—an act of daring, some unheard-of deed of wildness which should shake even their hardened nerves.

The lion-tamer only answered with a half-contemptuous shrug of his broad shoulders. At last he interrupted them, saying in his sonorous voice : " Much better let the animals sleep in peace, gentlemen ! Why remind them oftener than necessary that they are wretched captives ? "

How affecting it was ! Positively that voice would be capable of sinking down and grasping the very heart in your bosom.

The request was instantly withdrawn. As nothing could be got out of the beasts, they turned their attention more and more to Lou's dog. They overwhelmed him with caresses ; teased him, that they might enjoy the anger of such a magnificent creature ; they even gave him champagne to drink.

Stories were told of the courage of such dogs ; assuredly they would engage in combat with a wild beast. "That would be delightful to witness," said one of the ladies, tapping her champagne glass against the edge of her little teeth.

They must be noisy in their cups, so a toast was proposed ; but to whom ? Why, the grand old Cape lion. "Long live his Majesty King Essed ! Hip-hip, hurrah !" they roared. One quick glance flashed from Essed's tragically grave eyes ; then, as if in contempt, he buried his head still deeper in his huge mane.

And while they were hurrahing it happened. At the back of one of the cages where a lion lay stretched out fast asleep, the tip of his red tongue showing between his teeth, a little door opened.

It was a young Barbary lion, a splendid specimen, which had been kept apart from the

rest because it was to be sold to a dealer in Amsterdam for four thousand francs. He was past the age for taming, but would hurt nobody, the keepers said.

For a second or two the door remained open. Then something appeared, and with one bound stood inside the cage. The door closed instantly behind it.

The dog! Zeppa! The hound!

Who had done that? Thunder and devils! who had dared?

Lou sat glaring as if turned to stone. But Farmilli started to his feet. "What's this?" he thundered, his eyes blazing with anger.

"Oh, they'll get on all right together," somebody said.

Every one rose and pressed forward, every eye fixed in bloodthirsty desire upon the cage.

Zeppa stood in it, sweeping his great tail to and fro, his eyes fixed immovably on the still sleeping lion.

It grew still all about—you could hear the dog's hurried, excited breathing.

The lion stretched, drew up his legs, and opened his mighty jaws in a paroxysm of yawning.

"Grand!" was the ecstatic cry from all sides.

Farmilli stood in front of the cage with a crowbar in his hand ; not a muscle moved in his set face.

Something must happen now ! Here was their performance after all ! What would the lion do ?—what the dog ?

The lion raised his head and shoulders, and drew his forepaws in ; then with a loud rustle shook his young mane. At that moment he first became aware of the intruder, but did not deem him worthy of more than a passing glance of indifference. He fell to licking one paw with his flexible tongue.

" Didn't I tell you so ? They haven't that much spirit, these beasts," snarled the Monster Ox loud enough for the Pimentos to hear.

Zeppa seemed to want to provoke the lion ; with his forepaws stretched out stiffly and his back bent he stood there as if making ready for a spring, muffled barks proceeding from his half-opened mouth. His rapid breathing was still audible through the silence.

Suddenly the door opened for the second time, or rather was wrenched open with a jerk that made the iron bolts jar and rattle, and another form leaped into the cage.

A man ! Farmilli ? No, he still stood in

front of the cage inside the tent. No white man, but a black—Lou himself!

Some one clapped, the others followed suit. Farmilli's voice thundered in between: "Back! Out of that cage this moment! Back, I say! devil take you!"

Signor Pimento rushed forward in fury; why, the fellow had an axe in his hand—he was going to kill that lion!

Lou stood there straight and rigid, lightning flashing from his eyes. His teeth showed wide and gleaming in a grim and horrible smile—the only sign of life in his face. Not a muscle quivered in the whole form, only in his hand he slowly swung Aukadauba's battle-axe.

Ah! he would not leave his Zeppa in the lurch. He knows right well that yonder beast will suffer no black man to approach it; but his Zeppa, his friend, he cannot stand by and see him sacrificed.

A scream of horror broke from some woman's lips; then silence, breathless expectation, in the crowd.

Farmilli rushed out.

The whole thing happened in five, six, seven seconds; they staring intently at the cage never knew how it was.

The lion shot up, opened his jaws, and showed his teeth menacingly back at Lou's, and the air vibrated with sharp rolling R-r-r-rs.

In one instant—was it the dog who sprang first or was it the lion?—in the place where Zeppa's right eye had been there was a great hideous gaping wound, from which the blood poured down. It was there the lion had planted his blow.

Blood! blood! blood in the menagerie!

Instantly they smelt it in the other cages—scented, sniffed, snarled, howled at the blood that flowed.

One of the spectators gasped an "ah!" of satisfaction. Ah! now they had got the blood they were longing for, those outside the cages.

They saw Lou seize the dog, throw him back, place himself in front of him, covering him with his own body; they saw the gleaming axe flash in the Nubian's uplifted hand.

Then with one bound the dog hurled him aside, so that he staggered against the wall and nearly lost his balance. With a howl of rage Zeppa sprang upon the lion, the blood from his wound spurting upon the spectators.

There followed a roar, one single roar, but it gave voice to a whole world of agony. The lion

gave one backward bound, fell, and rolled over and over, beating the floor and the walls with paws and tail ; the cage rocked and the bars rattled. Then up again—up and leaping in the air ; he must be blinded with pain to waste his fury on the empty air.

The little door opened, Farmilli's strong arm came through, and with a grasp of iron dragged out first the dog, and then the Nubian.

What had happened ? The lion was bleeding, it trickled red down his nose. He threw himself moaning on the floor, rolled about in agony, gave a few short roars and then whined pitifully.

Zeppa had bitten him in the nose. Pimento was beside himself ; he beat the air with his clenched fists and wanted to rush out.

They held him back. Things would probably turn out to be less bad than he imagined.

" What, not bad ! bitten in the nose, and not bad ! Sacr-ra-m-mento di diavolo—it will die, it must die of it !" Oh ! and oh ! for the splendid animal, he lamented. Four thousand francs he was to get for it. *Dio di Dio*—the beautiful creature !

Next he was seized with fury. He would shoot the dog, shoot him on the spot, as sure as he was alive ; by the lives of all the other animals he

swores he would do it. They had hard work to keep him back.

He was going to shoot Zeppa! This alone Lou heard outside, and lifted his battle-axe. Who was going to shoot Zeppa? He would cut that man down instantly.

With the greatest difficulty they got the axe away from him, trying to explain to him that Signor Pimento was in no mood for joking.

"Lou not joke;" and it was evident enough from that wrath-distorted face that he, too, considered it no joking matter.

They tried to pacify him, and thought it would be wiser if he made off as soon as possible; his Zeppa would in any case not be sure of his life if the lion died; and die it inevitably must—it could never get over such a wound in such a place.

Lou did not hesitate long. They could hear Pimento raging inside the menagerie, and the dying groans of the wounded lion. A few minutes later, after Zeppa's ghastly wound had been temporarily bound up, the two had left the place.

They ran along the twilit beach, faster and faster, though there was none to pursue them. The waves of the now almost full tide crept hungrily nearer; behind, beside, in front of

them, nothing but the rushing, tumbling waters—hunting them down, paralysing them with their thousand voices. The water crept stealthily over the smooth sand, licking round their feet, hemming them in and cutting them off from dry land.

Why not escape to the higher ground?

Because there they would fall in again with men, terrible men. Better far be swallowed up by the sea, than come again within reach of man's knavish hand. Ah! Farmilli was right, love for mankind was impossible, quite impossible.

He grasped the dog tighter by the collar. Zeppa was panting, and he stumbled as he trotted along. Lou had difficulty in dragging him over the sands, into which their feet sank deep with every step.

The dog had lost much blood; what if he should die of it? Lou's blood boiled at the thought. Then he would have revenge, bloody revenge upon them! Then they should see and know a true Aukadauba in all the savageness of his race.

Not till the faint steely glitter of the great waste of waters had faded to palest silver and the first yellow streak of dawn began to show above the Caucal rock did they creep into shelter.

It was a singular hut, composed of great slabs of stone and covered with a thick growth of blackberry—a Druid grave. But quite early in the morning people were there again to drive them out; only harmless tourists, it is true, fussing about the place and measuring the stones; but, nevertheless, people.

Lou and Zeppa fled.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR TWO FRANCS.

ZEPPA'S wound was very slow to heal, one eye was quite gone. The necessary attentions to the poor animal consumed all the money Lou had. And after that?

Beg? Beg from people? Never, never again! To this day he was ashamed of ever having done so. Better starve—yes, starve outright—than ask alms of these terrible people! Lou had grown too proud, and Zeppa also would disdain to ask their charity, he thought.

The old friendship between the two was entirely restored, born anew and purified by the dangers they had gone through together. Lou had now no cause to be ashamed of meeting the dog's eye; the fidelity and love which beamed from the one eye still remaining to the half-blind creature was deeper and more touching than ever before.

And they did starve—supporting their wretched lives on what the open fields afforded them, or from the chance gleanings of the streets.

Misery and the search after a mouthful of food led them far and wide through the land. But the cold and horrors of winter brought down Lou's proud spirit. He pondered deeply over ways and means for escaping out of the claws of starvation, but they all led back to or near to human habitations.

At length despair laid such hold upon him that even this fear began to fade. He could not bear to see the maimed animal suffer any longer; it broke his heart, something must be done.

At the gate of a magnificent country seat in Blaixois the following scene took place. One summer's afternoon the proprietor was strolling through the green shade of the park with his two children, when with a cry of terror they pressed closer to their father's side.

“Papa, two wild beasts!” cried the girl, pointing to the gate through which you could see the sunny landscape beyond.

Pressed between the bars of the gateway appeared two heads—fantastic, savage, difficult to distinguish in the shade cast by the overhanging quivering leaves.

It might be two animals, or one of them was possibly a human being. The eyes—only three were visible—glared fixedly into the garden; no white showing round the bluish-brown irises.

Gradually the gentleman made out one of the heads to be that of a man. The skin had a singular hue, dyed by sun and weather to a dirty reddish-brown. The tangled woolly hair, pressed by the bars close against the hollow cheeks, hung down behind like an animal's mane. The protruding jaw, with its large, sharp, fang-like teeth, had a horrid gnashing movement.

Beside this head rose the snorting, snuffling muzzle of a hound, whose dun-coloured coat was rough and shabby; only the sharply cut nose was black and glossy, as if it had been newly polished. One side of the head appeared to be made up of all sorts of shreds and patches, and in place of the eye there was a dark, staring, contracted scar.

A hard gnarled hand at the end of an immeasurably long arm pushed itself through the gate. The dog, as if speaking for the owner of the hand, gave an imploring, almost cat-like whine.

Then a piteous voice, in which many of the tones were wholly missing like the dumb notes of an old piano, cried "Moussou ! Moussou ! Kind

Moussou, buy nigger! Nigger very cheap—called Lou—Lou Paris! Lou had Moussou—Moussou dead!"

It was a strange litany. The gentleman did not understand, and came nearer to the gate with the children.

They hung back. "They bite, papa—they will bite!" cried the little boy.

"Moussou! Zeppa hungry—Lou hungry. Not beg! Moussou buy Lou!" And the Nubian slapped his bare breast, on which the bones stood out sharply. "Lou only cost twenty francs!"

A flame shot through Lou's eyes. Was he thinking of the heap of money his dead master had given for him that day in Cairo? And now he was offering himself for sale for a paltry twenty francs! Well, want had brought him low.

The gentleman shook his head, he really did not understand.

Lou would not give it up; ever more urgently came his imploring voice, "Ten francs, Moussou! Lou very cheap—Lou and Zeppa—all for ten little francs! Lou worth five francs—real nigger—not painted. Kind Moussou—Moussou—give two francs—have Lou and Zeppa!"

The gentleman took a piece of money from his

purse and put it into the beggar's claw-like hand with a sign that they were to move off.

What, he was not going to take it? Actually the fellow was shaking his head and holding out the money again through the gate.

"Lou not beg," he stammered.

"Then what do you want?" returned the gentleman harshly. "Be off with you!"

Lou still held the money in his outstretched hand, it glittered in the sunshine; how willingly he would have kept it; but "Lou not beg!"

A low whine came from the dog's drooping mouth. It sounded like an entreaty. The Nubian withdrew his hand on the spot; with a haste which contrasted strangely with his former reluctance he put the money in his pocket.

The dog's beseeching whimper had reminded him of the "big dishes"; perhaps, too, of the crust of dry bread he had been wont to order for himself: the temptation was too strong.

Just this once he would take the money for the sake of the "big dishes."

They went on their way, and were soon lost to sight in a cloud of dust. The dog had a laboured trot, and Lou dragged wearily at his side, limping painfully with one leg, while the dust rose up above their heads and journeyed with them.

CHAPTER XIV.

ZEPPA'S HUNGER.

THE great fountains at St. Cloud were playing once more, and again a cloud of golden dust rolled and billowed above the noisy swarming crowd.

At one spot there was a block, where curiosity had packed the crowd more closely together. It was in front of a butcher's stall with great caldrons, from whence issued a grey, greasy smelling steam. The butcher, a colossal fellow with a bloated red face, held a black man fast by his tattered shirt-collar.

Was that Lou? How could he, in the one year that had passed since he left the menagerie, have aged so fearfully?

His features were sunken and relaxed, unutterable weariness, want, and misery glared from his fever-stricken eyes. His skin was dull with changing tints that ranged from muddy brown to yellowish grey. His hair was grey, blanched by

misery and the perpetual dust of the high roads.

There, too, was the dog. With the infuriated eagerness of a wild beast he was devouring a large juicy piece of meat, keeping up a low growl while he tore and gulped, and with wicked side-glances defending his possession of the toothsome morsel against the pushing crowd.

The hound was no less changed than Lou. The handsome russet coat, which had faded to a dingy clay-colour, in which the white markings on his chest were no longer distinguishable, flapped round his skeleton frame like a mantle that had grown too wide.

"I'll teach you to steal meat, my friend;" blustered the butcher in unsteady accents. "I'll teach you the law on the subject of a piece of meat, *mon vieux!* What do you say? Hungry? Well, if he is, he needn't grab the best and tenderest joint in the whole market!"

It was no use for Lou to speak, they understood but few of the words—it sounded scarcely human.

"Zeppa hungry, very hungry. Zeppa die—Lou no money—Lou not let Zeppa die." A policeman broke in with a great air of authority, and was for taking Lou off at once.

He struggled, he would not go without the

dog. "Zeppa come too—Zeppa too—Lou not without Zeppa!"

The poor creature was so weak, they soon overpowered him.

"Zeppa! Zeppa!" he cried in an agony of terror.

"Zeppa! Zeppa!" he implored in faint and trembling tones.

The dog did not stir. The wolfish eagerness with which he was appeasing the gnawing pangs of a long fast had made him deaf to everything else.

"Zeppa come! Zeppa be good!" Lou besought him distractedly.

The dog shot a quick side-glance in the direction of the speaker, and went on gnawing and tearing at his booty.

"Zeppa-a!" Lou's voice was sharp and menacing, his eyes blazed.

At this moment hunger had roused so much of the beast in the dog that over his food he had forgotten every law of friendship and loyalty.

Lou managed to free himself from his captors, and with a howl of despair tried to throw himself upon the dog. They held him back.

One last look full of a sudden overwhelming horror, and he allowed himself to be led away unresisting, his head sunk lifeless on his breast.

"Zeppa, Zeppa," came from time to time in a heart rending whisper over his lips.

At the police-station he was regarded as mad : cowering in a corner, trembling in every limb, with vacant eyes, grasping into the empty air. At short intervals he would call on Zeppa in every possible tone of voice, and all through the night they heard him calling and moaning.

It was too hard, too hard. For a piece of meat—a miserable piece of meat—the dog had deserted him !

In his torment and rage he ran his head against the wall as if to crush the thoughts that tortured him.

Ah-ha, it was there again, the great lash of Cairo ! whistling and rushing round his head; and poor despairing Lou lost all hold upon the wretched fragments of life left him.



CHAPTER XV.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

BUT he was not to be utterly laid low. Into this poor, hunted, mutilated life there was to fall one ray of happiness—one of those last strong dazzling efforts of the sun, before the great darkness of the storm swallows it up

Lou had no news of Zeppa. Not that he would have despaired of finding the dog, even in the vast labyrinth of Paris, had he chosen to search for him. But he did not choose, he was not going to run the risk of being driven out again from the dog's affection by a rival in the shape of a piece of meat.

Zeppa had insulted him, had cut him to the heart.

It was not true what Farmilli had said, that animals were better worth loving than people. Who was worth loving? Whom could one trust in all the wide world? To whom be faithful? who was good, who was capable of self-sacrifice.

An immense blank settled down upon him ; the laconic *rien*, which had so often served as an answer for want of a larger stock of words, now assumed a sharper emphasis, a deeper meaning.

Rien ! and the questioner almost fell back at the word ; it was like the stroke of an axe cutting off all further possibility of conversation.

Lou let himself be driven along by the chances of the day, turning in here, there, anywhere. He took up any kind of employment that came in his way, to drop it again as quickly. For whose sake should he starve ? But, on the other hand, for whom should he take the trouble of earning money ?

To-day he was wearing a fantastic livery, and on his head a new fez. He stood at the corner of the Rue Royale and the Place de la Concorde, armed with a bundle of advertisements which he was distributing in the interests of a restaurant tottering on the brink of bankruptcy.

It was a bright frosty day in January, at the hour when the carriages return from the Bois de Boulogne, glittering and flashing in the pale violet light of evening, with their spirited horses and the fair faces of the occupants rosy tinted by the fresh breeze of the forest.

A row of carriages had come to a standstill. Just in front of Lou stood an elegant victoria, in which sat a lady. Lou glanced indifferently at the carriage, and then—was it fright? was it surprise?—stiffened where he stood, his outstretched hand still holding the papers. Was it a vision suddenly appearing to him?

From the midst of the costly furs and the glittering cloud of daintiness with which the lady was surrounded shimmered something red. Not the flaring red for which a certain long lost Lili had been so famous ; it was a marvellous red gold, and yet, it was Lili—Lili herself !

With wide-open vacant eyes Lou stared at the apparition. At that moment the lady raised her head with its tiny hat. The faintest shadow of a smile played over the white, very white, face veiled in airily transparent gauze ; the little teeth flashed out between the bright red lips.

“Lou !” It was like the light stroke of a bell.

Ah ! It was she ! it was she !

Lou sprang at the carriage and fell upon the little hand, which was scarcely visible amongst the ruches and lace inside the fur sleeves, and half hidden by a glittering jewelled bracelet which slipped down over it.

He covered the delicately perfumed glove with

kisses ! He had taken leave of his senses ! Unintelligible, strange-sounding words came in whispers from his lips, as if he had caught something of lost Zeppa's joyful whimpering.

In another moment he was seated in the carriage, opposite to her ; the warm clinging fur rug spread over both. What a delicious perfume streamed from it, and what a kindly light beamed from her blue eyes !

Lou was intoxicated—bewildered—beside himself ! He trembled in every limb, everything swam and danced before his eyes ; never had his teeth gleamed so white.

Her voice broke the spell at last. “ But, Lou, do throw away those stupid papers ! ”

He obeyed mechanically. They were opposite the Madeleine, at the entrance to the Boulevard of the same name. He threw the whole packet of papers into the air—threw them high with a shrill “ A-ih,” which escaped him in the joy of the moment.

It was as if he had let loose a flock of pigeons. The papers fluttered off across the broad pavement, over the heads of the strolling, jostling crowd, above the carriages and omnibuses, against the stern majestic colonnade of the Madeleine—the whole Place was dappled with them ; some of

them, caught by the light breeze, whirled high out of the damp and gloomy shadow of the houses into the region of the setting sun, where they gleamed in crimson glory.

A few of the papers fell back into the victoria. Lili snatched at them, full of childish glee, the butterfly suddenly peeping out from the distinguished, well-dressed lady. And she laughed so heartily, so refreshingly ! The old bell-like laughter which had rung so loudly years before in the high-walled courtyard. And here was that same laughter rousing merry echoes among the columns of the great cathedral.

There was a general excitement. Boys ran shouting after the papers, heads crowded to the plate-glass windows of the *café* in the Place, laughing and nodding ; some of the pale-gloved hands clapped applause. Even the statuesque repose of the faces of the great ladies in their carriages was broken by an amused smile.

Who did not know Mira—"the golden Mira"—the *diva* of the Renaissance, the spoilt darling of the Boulevard Journales—the merriest, pertest, most audacious singing-bird in all Paris ? Who did not recognise that laugh, those gloom-dispelling ripples ? Every note was pure gold which found a jingling echo every night at the

ticket-office of the Renaissance. And here she was casting this gold wantonly into the air, in the public street, where every one could scramble for it.

What a heavenly gratis performance! Oh, spendthrift that she was!

She went on wasting the treasures of her laughter long after they had passed the Madeleine and were bowling along the Boulevard. And all this for astonished Lou only, for the gay notes were drowned now by the rattle of the carriages and the many noises of the street. All for Lou, heaping him with riches at one stroke. She took up one of the papers and read: ““Where to get the best dinner in Paris?’ Well, Lou, do you know? Where is the Eldorado of all the gourmets of Paris! Where is it, Lou? You don’t know yourself! You are just the same dear old stupid you used to be, aren’t you, Lou? I’ll tell you; it is, Rue Picardette, No. 323, the rendezvous of the nations—do you hear? *Dejeuner* for one franc sixty-five centimes. Dinner at two francs fifty—three francs—three francs fifty, ha! ha! ha! Choice wines, ha! ha! ha!”

She let the advertisement fly away.

“That isn’t true what your paper says, Lou.

You will have to get others printed. Where does one get the best dinner? Why, at Mademoiselle Mira's, Lou—first soubrette of the Grand Renaissance Theatre—living at No. 17 Rue de Provence. Well, you shall judge for yourself if her cooking does not beat the Eldorado of the gourmets of Paris: dinner at 3 francs—3.50—4 francs—choice wines, ha! ha! ha!"

"Jaques, drive through the great Boulevards, do you hear?" she cried at the broad stolid back of the coachman, rising enormously high above Lou's head.

A little while later the absinthes and liqueurs in the *cafés* of the great Boulevards were telling one another the astounding news that "the golden Mira" had been seen driving through the Boulevard, as proud and audacious as you please, with a regular low nigger at her side.

"Her brother, perhaps?" suggested a pert maraschino.

"A freak of that sort is just like her," observed a poisonous green absinthe. "Count Cabrera will congratulate himself on such a brother-in-law."

But a glowing manilla was extremely indignant that they should credit Count Cabrera with any serious intentions towards this Mira.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH "GOLDEN MIRA."

AN hour later Lou was seated at table with "golden Mira," in No. 17 Rue de Provence. He was to give his opinion as to whether you did not dine better there than at the much lauded "Rendezvous of the Nations."

"But you are not eating anything, dearest Lou. It is only an actor's dinner, it is true; we players may only pick at delicate trifles like birds, if we are to sing like birds in the evening. Some other time you shall be introduced to my *cuisine* in its full glory;" and she put a tempting morsel on his plate.

How could Lou eat? Every trace of hunger had been effaced by the surprise which still held him spell-bound. He dared not touch the massive glittering silver forks, nor cut through to the delicate flowery arabesques of the fine smooth plates.

Everything upon the table gleamed and glistened and sparkled, even the viands took on something of this festive air; and the steam from the dishes shone golden in the warm pleasant light shed by the great hanging lamp.

The rest of the room beyond the range of this light was sunk in dusky gloom. Nothing was visible of the ceiling but the sharp white edges of the mouldings, and the shadowy figures on the dark tapestry seemed to gaze at them out of the dim distance. Every sound occasioned by the changing of the dishes, every spoken word, sounded curiously hushed and softened by that dimness. It was charmingly cosy.

The half-ghostly nature of the attendance somewhat confused Lou, however. Before he was aware of it, a dish would appear at his elbow, starting out of the darkness into the circle of friendly light. The next moment, where his companion sat opposite to him, he would perceive the apparition of a seemingly aristocratic gentleman glide noiselessly about, carrying that same dish, his white cravat and the white of his eyes gleaming across the table. Occasionally this gentleman would bend forward into the region of the light, revealing a smooth-shaven, distinguished diplomatic face which greatly disconcerted Lou. He felt he ought

to get up and bow to this nobleman, humbly asking his permission to be allowed to stay where he was.

Lou was to give an account of himself. Mira overwhelmed him with a flood of questions—what had he done? how had he fared? where had he been all this time. "Stay, it must be a long time since——"

She paused, lost in recollections; but they evidently made her uncomfortable.

"Oh, you really must eat something, Lou. Claude, hand the gentleman something else."

The ghostly dish reappeared at his side. He did not find much to answer.

Had he had a bad time, then?

"Yes," he nodded, but almost imperceptibly.

"How so? Why don't you tell me all about it, Lou?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and nearly choked over a large mouthful which presented difficulties in the way of chewing.

She laughed. "Well, you shall have it better now. You will stay with me, won't you, Lou?"

He nodded assent, but with a timid questioning side-glance at the waiting shadow in the white cravat, to see what he was likely to think of the arrangement.

The bell rang outside. A waiting-maid, as gaily and coquettishly attired as a fashion-plate for a Carnival ball, put her head with its little cap and bright fluttering ribbons round the door.

"Monsieur de Fronsacques," she chirped.

"I am engaged, Mariette—do you hear!" cried Mira.

"Monsieur de Fronsacques, Madame," repeated Mariette in a louder tone—half surprised, half urgent.

"I—am—engaged—I tell you!" and with each word Mira rapped the table with the handle of her fork, which she held upright like a sceptre.

The maid flashed round upon her heel, and shut the door behind her with a pretty audible bang.

"I suppose one may sometimes be alone," said Mira, shaking her golden head. "We have so much to tell one another, haven't we, Lou? Claude, tell Jacques not to bring the carriage till seven o'clock.

Lou could not hear whether the mysterious Monsieur Claude went or not.

"Lou, do you remember our going to see the marionettes at the Champs Elysées, and how we

laughed? We will go again some day, and have another good laugh, shall we?"

Lou made a doubtful face.

"Why, Lou, you surely have not forgotten how to laugh? I shall have to teach you again. And your French does not seem to be particularly brilliant. Shall we begin our lessons again, eh?"

There was another ring. The ribbons fluttered at the door again. "Madame, le Comte Cabrera!"

"I am engaged! I told you so before. Can't you hear what I say, Mariette? It's a regular plot against me to-day!" She was seriously put out.

Mariette did not move; Mira angrily clapped down the glass she had raised to her lips, at which the door shut with a louder bang than before.

"Do you remember what trouble we had with that dog—with Zeppa? I wonder what has become of him?"

Lou's face clouded. "Zeppa *rien*," he murmured dejectedly. "Zeppa not good." And he hacked nervously at the piece of chicken on his plate.

"Ah!" said Mira, "Zeppa not good? Did I not always say that dog was a wretch?"

Lou sighed heavily, and began attacking the bird furiously with his teeth.

"Madame, le Baron Wisby!" lisped the fashion-plate once more.

"I tell you!—how often must I repeat it? Who did you say—Baron Wisby?" Mira smiled a little indulgent smile. "Ah! *ce bon petit* Wisby; well, I don't mind, ask him in, Mariette."

This time the door closed noiselessly. There entered a very gaily dressed little gentleman, with a charming and carefully groomed fair head—it might have been that of a doll. He advanced with a series of dancing bows, and Mira offered him her alabaster hand glittering with jewels. She held it very high with the back upwards, as a sign apparently that it was to be kissed. He grasped it timidly with his delicately gloved fingers, but scarcely a hair of the cherished blond moustache touched the back of the little outstretched hand. When he raised his round infantile face it was suffused with blushes.

Mira nodded kindly at him to encourage him, and proceeded to introduce the gentlemen with a grave and ceremonious air. "Monsieur le Baron Wisby—Monsieur—Monsieur Lou of Cairo."

Wisby bowed in the most correct style; Lou

sat stiff and straight, grinning at Mira and the new-comer with all his teeth. Mira tittered, and Wisby's watery blue eyes stared at the Nubian as if he had been some strange monster.

"The gentlemen have never met before?" inquired the mischievous *diva*.

Wisby recollect—was it not the late Marquis de Breteuille's black man?

Mira offered the Baron a seat beside her. She put various questions to him. How was he? What was the news? Was it not a long time since he had seen this or that person? Why had he not been at the Renaissance last night? To all of which Wisby answered briefly with the bashful air of a fourteen-year-old girl from the provinces.

The conversation would not have been very lively but for Mira's incessant flow of chatter. Now and then she would come out with a peal of laughter. Wisby joined in heartily and unaffectedly, and Lou did his best to do the same. What a time it was since he had laughed! Mira would really have to teach it him again.

She signed to Lou to come closer to her other side; she then seized a plate of sweets and began dividing them between her two neighbours, each a little plateful. As neither of them seemed

inclined to begin, she took upon herself to assist them. With a comical air of importance, as if preparing for some laborious undertaking, she threw back the costly lace sleeve far up the blue-veined whiteness of her arm. Then before either of them had time to prevent her, each had a piece of sweet in his mouth.

Wisby turned painfully red, but he munched it without a word.

"Will you make haste and swallow it?" she ordered the Nubian. And instantly another piece for both.

"Quick! But you must take a good bite;" and taking a piece herself, she bit into it boldly —you could hear her crunching it between her little teeth.

A third piece; Wisby shielded himself behind his straw-coloured gloves, she slapped them down and he was obliged to give in.

"I am forced to play the mamma with you, and you'll have to do as I bid you—do you hear? Mouths open, I say! Lou, unclose your teeth!" she commanded.

She proceeded to stuff piece after piece into their mouths and her own, too—quicker and quicker, the two men swallowing and choking.

Mariette rushed in once more.

"Madame, they would take no refusal, and they have remained in the salon. I could not help it. They said that if Madame received little Wisby,—pardon, le Baron Wisby—they need not be sent away. Here they are."

The tall and powerful form of "le beau Fronsacques" appeared in the doorway, and simply lifted the excitedly gesticulating figure to one side; Cabrera followed, his large single eye-glass flashing through the gloom.

"Pray forgive us for forcing our way in after all," said Fronsacques, twirling his handsome moustache still further out from his insipid, fashionable face.

Cabrera said nothing, but a lightning flash seemed to emanate from his eye-glass.

"B'jour, gentlemen," cried Mira—it was like the first few notes of a song. "Excuse me, but I had a real reason for refusing you"—she crunched the sugar she had in her mouth—"an old friend whom I came upon unexpectedly. We had so much to talk about. Ah, pardon! I don't know if the gentlemen are acquainted."

She repeated the introduction gravely enough except for the fine malicious smile that played round her brilliant lips. "Monsieur Lou of Cairo—Count Cabrera—Monsieur de Fronsacques."

Cabrera dropped his eye-glass with a twitch of the muscles of his face, and peered at Lou out of his little beady black eyes. Lou munched away at his sweets, staring in astonishment at the well-remembered parchment-coloured face of the Count; Fronsacques for the sake of appearances made a quarter of a bow.

"Ah, if I am not mistaken, it's our good old figure-head of a Lou," drawled Cabrera. "Well, how is the nigger, and what has he been up to?"

A faint flush overspread Mira's forehead—not her cheeks ; the hot blood could not penetrate their coating of paint.

"Count Cabrera," she observed, very quickly but firmly, "I had the pleasure of introducing to you my friend, an old friend of my youth. I have no idea to whom you are alluding. But the gentlemen will no doubt excuse us if we return to our seats. Won't you sit down, gentlemen ?"

She took the plate, and bending over it seemed occupied in searching out some special dainty.

"Perhaps ces Messieurs would like some, too ?" she said before looking up.

As she raised her eyes, she surprised Cabrera in a quick gesture. Only this : with a careless

but imperious wave of the hand he had signed to the Nubian to bring him an easy-chair standing against the wall.

Nothing more ; and Lou, good-natured Lou was in the act of rising to carry out the order.

"Sit still!" commanded Mira.

But starting up herself, she fixed Cabrera with her blazing eyes for fully three seconds, and seizing an antique bronze handbell, rang it furiously like an alarum.

Claude appeared instantly.

Without turning to the servant, she ordered : " Claude, offer these gentlemen chairs."

She said it very slowly and sternly, without deigning to glance at any one, gazing straight before her into space.

Cabrera shrugged his square padded shoulders as one accustomed to that sort of thing from the *diva*. He was only rather tickled at the thought of the rivalry that he would no doubt have to sustain against this dark gentleman.

Half an hour later, when the visitors had gone, she ordered a tailor to be sent for, for Lou—a gentleman's tailor—one of the first, Monsieur Foote if possible.

" You must take off that gaudy rubbish at once, Lou—do you hear ? " she insisted.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MY MOTHER HAS EATEN ALL THE DATES."

THAT same evening Lou was to hear Mira sing. The famous burlesque "Fla-Fla" still filled the Renaissance to the last seat, even now after it had been given some hundreds of times. The theatre had to thank Mira for its overflowing coffers; she was inexhaustible in giving a fresh charm to every change in her many costumed part.

Lou sat in the parquet beside a stout snorting gentleman, who prided himself on having missed only five out of the two hundred and sixty-six performances of "Fla-Fla." "I can't imagine what will happen when "Fla-Fla" ceases to exist—there will be an end of me," he said with a comical sigh.

They spoke of Mira. Some enthusiasts lauded her to the skies. "Mira is divine! Mira is unique! She is the glory of the age—the most

brilliant star that ever rose in the firmament of art!"

One young man, with glassy eyes and a nervous, twitching of the face, offered solemnly to run anybody through who dared to dispute the axiom of golden Mira's monopoly of fame. "I would simply run him through the body," he protested.

The curtain rose; soon after which the "glory of the age" appeared, welcomed by applause from every side.

Alas! she had taken him captive once more—once again his heart was ensnared in the bewildering meshes of her voice. He forgot everything—how cruelly she had often treated him—how she had ended by deserting him, without one word of regret. Listening to those tones, all his hatred of mankind melted away; he might even put his trust again in an animal—a dog—Zeppa himself if he were there. Assuredly he would have forgiven him all at that moment.

She was a sorceress—who could resist her?

Lou felt himself sinking into the old helpless slavery to her. He applauded with the best of them. The signal for clapping evidently came from the row of seats behind him. It was a deafening noise; the hands which produced it

must have been specially chosen for that purpose. It might have been a properly arranged chorus, one could distinguish higher and lower notes in it, the dominating bass being executed by an immense pair of hollow-sounding, swollen red hands.

One was obliged to join in—it was most exciting. Lou clapped till his hands burned ; he was not going to be outdone by anybody.

But presently, just as he raised his hands to clap with the rest, he stopped half-way, motionless with surprise.

In the middle of her dazzling rocket-like trills and roulades, she suddenly broke into a song—so strange, so magically heart-compelling, like an echo from some dim enchanted world. It held the soul enthralled, breathless, till the slow tears welled up and overflowed.

Most of them knew it. A general ah-h ! of satisfaction greeted the first notes, then every breath was hushed in listening silence.

The words were mere folly : “Mother has eaten all my dates, oh dear ! oh dear !” and so on.

But what melodious life she infused into that nonsense, brimming over with contagious laughter sighing forth in deepest sadness !

The applause shook the house. They clamoured for another equally well-known song.

She conceded and began : "Oh, what joy when each morning milk and butter brings for me!" etc.

There was a perfect tumult of delight as she filled the house with saucy rippling music.

Where had she learned these songs ?

Lou alone knew. Six years ago, on a sultry July evening, Lou and Lili were sitting in the rotunda of the Parc Monceaux. Close by the fountain murmured and whispered mysteriously, and the green phosphorescent lamps of the fireflies fluttered and circled in swarms through the gloom of the bushes, coming sometimes in glistening clouds till the pillars of the rotunda seemed frosted with pale sparks.

It was so solitary there. The roar of the great eager city broke upon the strand of this idyllic island in the middle of the park only in faintest waves of sound.

As usual, Lili had been trilling some of her Paris street songs. She asked Lou if they didn't sing anything down there in Cairo ?

At which some fellah songs occurred to him, which the Cairo donkey-drivers used to sing while they rested at the foot of the Pyramids. She

laughed at the queer tunes and his uncouth way of singing, but he had to repeat them, and she listened very attentively.

She asked what the words meant. Lou translated them laboriously word for word. Then she sang them after him, throwing herself into the spirit of the fellah songs with real enthusiasm.

In a few days they came rippling out as naturally as if she had heard them all her life.

So much had befallen Lou since then that the songs had almost faded from his memory. And now that he heard them again, it was from the brilliantly lighted stage of a Paris theatre! Like a sweet breath from his long vanished home, it wafted round his throbbing brow and filled his heart to bursting.

He could not clap—not now; it would have seemed like desecration. Silent and motionless, he sat there while the house rocked with the storm of applause.

In the pause he caught a remark or two round about him. They were disputing as to the origin of the songs. The young man who would "simply run anybody through," insisted that Mira had invented them herself. "Anyhow," they said, "she made her fortune with them."

Somebody gave the details. She had sung the songs for the first time two years ago in the Alcazar at Bordeaux. She made a sensation at once, though her rather thin little voice had excited but little remark till then.

This, however, was something quite out of the common run—this must not be allowed to slip ; and then her magnificent red hair ! That had no doubt taken on a more fashionable tinge—the reflection of the gold which poured in torrents into her lap. An agent on the look-out for voices had instantly carried her off from Bordeaux, and for a whole summer she made an unheard-of *furore* at the great Alcazar in the Champs Elysées—and all with these songs ! She had even been commanded to sing them at Court, and at one of the great summer fêtes at Compiègne they had overwhelmed her with marks of distinction and gracious approval. Finally, the manager of the Renaissance had succeeded in outbidding the tempting offers of his colleagues, and secured this star. Of course he had had to pay an awful price to get her away from the Alcazar.

"It's the speciality of the thing, gentlemen," puffed the fat man who had witnessed nearly all the two hundred and sixty-six performances of "Fla-Fla." "It all depends on the speciality!"

Lou had understood nothing of all this. One thing only he grasped : she had made her fortune by the fellah songs. By the help of these poor silly little songs she had risen to these giddy heights of fame.

And Lou had taught her those songs—poor, insignificant, black Lou !

A quickening joy possessed his heart. He felt he might now carry something within him higher, prouder ; not his head—that she despised now as then because it was black ; but his consciousness of being human. Surely he might lay claim to that now !

So he had been of some use in the world after all ! Thus he need no longer be cast aside as a worthless thing, because he was black !

CHAPTER XVIII.

MONSIEUR LOU OF CAIRO.

"WHY should you not be able to play the gentleman, Lou ?" said Mira. " You've got the clothes for it—why shouldn't you make as good a gentleman as Cabrera or de Fronsacques ? What is it, after all ? Bah ! a few yards of clothes put together by a celebrated tailor in the latest chic—a few gestures—a few bows—a studied phrase or two, and often a good dose of stupidity, I can tell you ! What ? Because you are black ? That's just a reason for it ! As if black people were not as good as white. We'll just see about that. I'll see if I don't teach them to respect my good friend Lou !"

Lou sighed. Alas ! this playing the gentleman was a very hard matter. In the old days vanity had spurred him on to try and shine as a dandy before the staring world of Paris, now he found it difficult to play the part after fate had dragged

him so mercilessly through the mire. "Lou not gentleman!"

He certainly cut a most unfortunate figure in his new and fashionable clothes. He felt as if he were dragging a cage about with him, and his movements had taken on an awkwardness and clumsiness which must inevitably make him a laughing-stock.

He could not fail to notice how they grinned and laughed at him, and hear their derisive remarks behind his back. He had a real horror of the supercilious diplomatist's face, of the high-toned, soft-footed *maître de table*. The mocking pertness of the women servants worried him like a tiresome swarm of gnats, and Mariette's exaggerated marks of respect drove him to desperation.

"Lou not gentleman," he groaned, placing the shining new hat on the table in front of him, and laboriously dragging off the light kid gloves from his hands—"Lou servant—Mira kind—Mira be true to him—Lou be Mira's servant."

"That's what you want?" she exclaimed. "Well it can't be done. I—let my old friend be my servant? You don't know Mira! They ill-treated us when we were poor and common and red-haired; now it is our turn to ill-treat them!" And she flourished her fan excitedly in

the air. "They will be furious, and so they shall be—just furious!"

She vowed she would make them respect him.

One day when they were going to drive out together, the servant slammed the carriage door in Lou's face as he was about to follow Mira.

"What's this?" hissed Mira, her eyes flashing.

The servant excused himself with a shrug; he had not observed the "gentleman"—with a strong emphasis on the word.

She ordered the man to leave her house: "On the spot, this instant!" she commanded in a towering passion.

The servant was to leave on his account? Lou begged her not to be so angry.

"I will teach them to be polite to you. Be quiet, Lou—you know nothing about it."

During the drive he cowered dejectedly in a corner of the carriage.

She burst out at him presently: "My dear fellow, if you are going to drive with me, you must not make such an undertaker's face—do you hear? People will think you are bored by me or I by you. Look cheerful this moment, now! And if you can't laugh, or won't, then at least show your teeth, so that you may look as if you were."

Lou did as he was bid. Alas! how difficult it was to play the gentleman! One must laugh without ever knowing what for. But he consoled himself with the reflection that she did not treat the others in any way differently.

In one thing only did she let him have his own way. He refused to occupy the bedroom with the heavily draped four-post bedstead she had assigned to him. "Why not?"

In her ante-room was a magnificent lion skin; he would sleep on that as he used to at Moussou's.

"Oh nonsense," she said, "that's not at all the fashion."

But it suddenly struck her how well it would look to have some one—a man—one of her devoted slaves, lying at her door. She had read of such things in novels.

"Very well, if you like; but you ought to know where the lion skin came from. Gérard the celebrated lion-hunter shot the animal himself. Count Cabrera gave it me. And very different people from you have slept on it before now, you wouldn't believe it! They found it very hard, but thought Mira harder still because she let them lie there and had no pity on them. None of them tried it twice. Well I don't mind—*felicissima notte!*"

After that the poor fellow had much to endure from the respect which Mira, with many an example, forced her people to show to Monsieur Lou of Cairo. He did not know where to flee to from their civility ; they nearly fell head over heels, they bowed so low to him ; in helping him off with his coat, they almost tore him limb from limb, they could not assist him quickly enough into the carriage, it was with difficulty that he kept upon his feet.

The more he begged them to desist, the worse they went on, and he knew that they made fun of him behind his back.

Mariette took a different tack from the rest. She simply ignored his existence ; swept passed him as if she did not see him, sometimes ran straight into him as if he were made of air, before he had time to spring aside. The dismissal of the servant had evidently been a great annoyance to the fiery little person.

But the other persons whom Mira really wished to annoy, her grand friends and admirers continued to pursue the course they had adopted on that evening on which Lou's star had first been in the ascendant. "Monsieur Lou of Cairo?"—quite so ; why not ? They would soon cure the eccentric little syren of this freak.

They behaved towards Lou with the utmost courtesy and seemed to take this "black gentleman" quite seriously. They overlooked his many clumsinesses with apparent magnanimity, or declared much that he did or left undone to be "of the very latest chic." They led him into all sorts of absurdities of dress, and then imitated him. It was "Monsieur Lou of Cairo does this, Monsieur Lou of Cairo says that."

The ephemeral gossip of the boulevards began to occupy itself more and more with Mira's friend. In private of course they shrugged their shoulders in contempt: how could the brilliant, the famous Mira lose her head over that half savage?

Spiteful tongues were ready to give full and thrilling details of the strange relations; jealousy tweaking some of them with red-hot pincers.

Mira would not let herself be put out. "They sha'n't have anything to say against you Lou! I can't paint your face white, but as to culture, we'll soon paint and decorate you, so that you can show yourself with the best."

And just as years ago she forced French phrases upon him, so now she began tormenting him with "culture." She instructed him how to come and go with chic, how to sit down,

how to eat and drink, even how to light a cigar. She called it "studies in *comme-il-faut*."

This time, too, there was much to laugh at, and she never missed an opportunity. The great toilette glass was generally a witness of their exercises, and sometimes the diva would wear the burlesque "masher" costume in which she appeared before the delighted spectators of "Fla-Fla."

"Not so low—that bow, Lou! You'll run your head into the looking-glass next." And turning to the glass she made him an elegant, graceful, smiling bow. She had practised it often enough ere now and before a far smaller mirror.

She took hold of him lightly, stood beside him at the glass, and forced him down with her in a bow.

"But you must not grin so, Lou—everything in its right place. Now, again, again! Bravo, bravissimo! Another hundred of such bows and I think you will have caught it at last."

Mariette, peeping through the chink of the door, could scarcely stifle her giggles. But in the kitchen she remarked, tapping her forehead with a sarcastic finger, that Madame must be cracked to be cutting such capers with a marionette like that.

On one occasion Count Cabrera surprised them

at this deportment practice. His Mephisto head, with the small piercing black eyes, suddenly appeared between them in the mirror.

It was like a spook, and gave Mira a real shock of fright.

But she recovered herself instantly, swung Lou round with her by the arms, and repeated the bow to Cabrera. Lou was forced to do it too.

Cabrera took it quite as a matter of course ; not a trace of his peculiar sardonic smile upon his face. He considered it all very natural ; she was evidently joking, and he laughed perfectly good-naturedly with her.

But afterwards Lou heard him talking very seriously to her at the other end of the boudoir. He was darting short sharp remarks at her, casting stern reproaches in her face, and that with a quiver in his deep voice which seemed to imply that he had a certain right to make these complaints.

She answered now and then with a laugh, growing less and, assured, till it sank to a mere faint echo.

Her eyes were on the ground, and she was playing with the leaves of a great plant, rolling and unrolling them pitilessly. Suddenly she raised her head, tossed back the golden hair with

a jerk, and turned upon him, defiance flashing from her splendid eyes.

"What are you talking about, Count? What do you want? I love him! Yes, I love him!" she cried aloud, as if she gloried in it.

And she left him *planté là*.

"They're angry! They *are* angry!" she cried exultingly when Cabrera had gone.

"Now, Lou, quick—that bow again! I should like to know who dares to say anything to me!"

"I love him; yes, I love him." It rang in Lou's ears all the evening; he did not hear one note of "Fla-Fla."

Ah, he did not believe it; he would not be so foolish. She had only said it to annoy that man: a caprice, a manœuvre. It was nothing more.

CHAPTER XIX.

GUIGNOL.

THEY made up their minds to have a good laugh once more ; Lou had positively forgotten how, and Mira determined to teach him again.

On a bright sunny afternoon in spring, Mira's victoria drove into the Champs Elysées and stopped not far from the great Alcazar. There was quite a stir as she came sweeping along, splendid and smiling, with Lou slouching a few paces behind in his new tall hat, looking almost as if he might be her servant. As she tripped along the crowded rows of chairs in the promenade there was a general "Ah !" of admiration at her wonderful hair, which glittered in the sunshine, making a halo round her delicate face.

She directed her course towards the railed-in audience of children and nurses sitting in front of Lyonese Marionette Theatre. Guignol had not yet begun his pranks, but his sly vagabond face

grinned at them from the drop scene on the little stage. A few squeaky violins fiddled away at a merry tune, most of which was lost in the chattering of the little spectators.

With exaggerated politeness the proprietress offered the new arrivals seats in the front row.

"No, we want to see the children laugh," protested Mira, and pushed Lou towards two empty chairs in the very centre of the closely packed crowd of children.

What a commotion it created amongst them ! To their already excited imagination Mira seemed like some dazzling and lovely emissary from fairyland, and there sat a real live negro, quite close to them ! What further need of Guignol ?

All the little heads, all the wide astonished eyes were turned towards them ; they crowded together on the chairs in order to have a better view, some of them even stood up on the seats. In the intense excitement of the moment the little red tongues went in and out between the dewy heart-shaped lips.

A little girl sitting next to Lou was frightened and left her seat ; the bigger ones laughed at her. "He doesn't bite ; why, he doesn't bite. He's quite tame !" went round the whispering nudging rows.

A boy with sparkling beady black eyes plucked up courage and held out his hand to Lou. The others would not be behind him in bravery, they must all shake his hand ; there was a great pushing and scrambliug between the chairs.

Lou smiled to see the little soft pink hands struggling for his big hard brown one ; his teeth became visible.

"Mamma, look at his teeth!" cried a frightened little one. "What teeth! Oh, what teeth!" Astonishment not unmixed with fear, was depicted on every little face.

Guignol rang up the curtain ; in the instant every little head turned towards the stage.

"Lou, you will have to take off your hat, or they won't be able to see behind you," said Mira.

The harlequinade began : Guignol distributed the first few blows—Clipp, clapp ! clipp, clapp!—of his cruel thick cudgel on the hard staring wooden heads of the puppets. The first laugh thrilled up lark-like into the sunny April air.

Ah, it did one good to laugh!

Mira was as happy as a child ; at the best parts she would nudge Lou to make him join in properly in the laughter, which he did most heartily ; here he was thoroughly at home, a child amongst the children.

From time to time a little head would turn to look at Lou's white teeth ; and the great broad grin of those teeth excited them to renewed and louder laughter.

It was a delightful chorus of clear little high-pitched voices, twittering like birds, or with shrill, silver, bell-like notes, and the deeper tones of the nurses in between ; while Mira's delicious peals broke through the general merriment like the sudden upward leap of a fountain.

A soft breeze fanned the little laughter-flushed faces and stirred the feathers and ribbons on the hats ; through the lightly swaying leaves of the trees the sunbeams danced and flickered like a swarm of golden butterflies over the gay and restless little audience.

Ah ! what bliss to be a child once more !

It was a stupid little play ; you couldn't make out clearly what it was all about. Among other things there was a Marquis in a cocked hat who appeared to be engaged in an extraordinary love affair with a young lady in stiff brocade. The lady rejected his suit with angular gestures. He vowed he would shoot himself, Very good, he might !

Immediately afterwards a miniature shot was heard behind the scenes—only a cap they let off ; the Marquis had shot himself ! But Guignol

appeared upon the scene, laughing, and declaring that the Marquis would probably very soon come to life again, as he, Guignol, had privately removed the priming from the pistol. If he did not die of fright, all would yet be well.

What ailed Mira that her laughter died away and even the last trace of a smile faded gradually, from her face?

When the pistol went off she started and trembled—that was nothing out of the way; but in Guignol's next knock-about scene she only gave one or two hysterical short laughs, and sat there, silent, staring at the stage with deeply brooding half-terrified eyes. Suddenly, when the shouts of delight were at their loudest, she rose, and with a last attempt at a smile beckoned to her companion to come with her.

Followed by the perplexed Lou, she rushed hurriedly to her carriage, and bade the coachman drive on, no matter where—only to drive!

She leaned back in a corner of the carriage pillow'd in her own hair, her half-drooping lids concealing the strange hard electric glitter of her eyes. Her delicate nostrils quivered. Now and again she would close the fan sharply with which she shielded her face from the mild April sun, and beat a rapid tattoo with it on her knee.

They drove along the Champs Elysées and the Avenue de l'Imperatrice to the Bois de Boulogne. Several people bowed to the carriage ; Mira did not appear to notice it. Not a word passed between them.

At last when the carriage turned into a remote avenue, where the prospect opened out wide before them, she remarked carelessly, " You were very fond of your Moussou, Lou ? "

The words were hardly put as a question. She knew very well—had seen years ago—how deeply attached he was to the Marquis.

" I knew somebody who was very fond of him too." Her voice was hard, almost indifferent, her eyes void of all expression.

Lou raised himself inquiringly.

" The woman who drove him to his death, Lou" She opened her fan slowly and shut it again. She felt Lou's wide bewildered eyes upon her face, but she did not look at him.

" Do you understand ? The woman who drove him to his death" she repeated very slowly, with increased emphasis.

She settled her head farther back, and fixing her eyes upon the clouds, she asked with forced composure : " Well, Lou, what would you do to her if you got hold of her ? "

Lou did not answer.

It was very quiet; no sound but the grinding of the wheels on the macadam, and the monotonous tramp of the horses' hoofs.

"Well, Lou?"

She turned round sharply, scorching him with the lightnings of her eyes. "Ah!" she cried, her voice shaken with excitement, "you would avenge your dead Moussou on her—wouldn't you? Would you kill her? Strangle her with your own hands—tear her throat with your teeth? . . . Ah, Lou! you would not do it. . . ." It was as though she had been trying to rouse the savage in him with the eager passion of her voice, her flaming eyes. Yes—yes—yes! that is what he would do!

There was such fierce determination in the nod of his head and in the glance that flashed from his dark eyes that she could not repress a shudder.

Turning away from him again, and laying a trembling hand on his: "You are a good fellow, Lou!—better than any of us!"

What did it all mean? What was she hinting at?

Another interval of deep silence.

Presently she began in the indifferent manner with which one discusses the news of the day, and

without looking at him. "I knew her very well—I know her still. She did love him—she thought she did—she vowed she did. She did not know but what that was love. Paris love! Mon Dieu! quite a special kind, a most abominably untrust-worthy kind of love. The ringing of a few gold pieces, and it is gone!—the flash of a diamond, and it vanishes away!"

Then with a deep heavy sigh: "One should not condemn her wholly—no, one should not quite condemn her. She had never heard of any other kind of love—what could you expect of her? You can't change your skin. The unlucky part of it was that he suffered from a totally different kind—yes, he suffered under it; he wrote verses, your Moussou; he was fond of promenading in the clouds. You see, my friend Lou, it is a very stupid story on the whole. If Guignol were to act it as it really happened, it would be a sad failure. Their bliss did not last very long: an excessively expensive bliss for your Moussou—it plunged him in debt, it ruined him. He might have pulled himself up in time, but no—his love was deaf and blind.

"But hers was so terribly clear-sighted, with all its wits about it. He came to her one day and said, 'I am a beggar, but what does that matter?

You love me and I love you.' He wanted to work, to begin a new life. It sounded so true—so sweet: just like a novel.

"Yes—she^t would be true to him, she vowed, and they shed a good many tears together.

"And she meant it—by Heaven she meant it ! One must not be too hard on her. But there was such a frightful thirst in her for all that was costly and brilliant and beautiful, for all that had a great name, everything glittering, for sweet sounds and sweet perfumes.

"She did not feel herself strong enough to endure that thirst which she knew she could satisfy at any moment. But then, too, what a dreamer he was to believe in the constancy of Paris love !

"As I said before, an absurdly simple story. He saw her one day in the Bois driving in a strange carriage. She had been taken by surprise, overcome by the splendid satin lining and the starting gold lace of the livery, and had not been able to resist. His lively imagination very probably saw more in the affair than really existed ; he saw too much with his heart. He must have suddenly been stricken with doubt as to the strength of her vows of constancy, and that doubtless put the pistol to his breast.

"He did not tell her he was going to shoot himself, and she did not give him permission, like the lady in the play. He was so dreadfully hasty; he should have waited; she might have thought better of it, might perhaps have learned to feel the other—his—kind of love!"

"No, no, no!" she protested, "no, no, no!" shaking her head violently, "I know she never would have. The thirst was too great, it was too great!"

It was as if she sought to reassure herself with her "No, no!" she continued saying it at intervals to herself.

Again silence. Through the rumbling of the carriage wheels you could hear the wood birds twittering and chirping; out of the far distance, from some leafy grove, came single, full, alluring notes. It was very lonely here.

In sudden alarm at the solitude she gave the order to turn back, speaking very loud, as if by her despotic tone to ward off every other thought.

She cast a quick glance at Lou's eager listening eyes, and a mournful pitying smile played over her face.

"Dear Lou, I don't suppose you have understood much of the whole story. Well, so much the better. One learns so many carefully turned

phrases on the stage that it is difficult to get out of the habit afterwards”

And not another word till they reached home.

She sat like a statue, lost in her own thoughts, only answering the bows of her acquaintances as they drove past with a scarcely perceptible haughty nod.

A fresh breeze blew in their faces as they drove through the Champs Elysées, fluttering the feathers and lace upon her hat and the soft gold curls that wantoned in the nape of her neck. She lifted her little nose to the wind, blinking her eyes and opening her lips from time to time to draw in deep refreshing draughts of the cool air.

Just before dinner Lou was standing at the window of the *salon*, his forehead pressed to the cool glass. Wild thoughts surged through his brain, although he had only grasped the half of what Mira had told him.

Who was that fatal woman? Why had he noticed nothing at the time? Sharp as the stab of a dagger came the thought—ah! that he could have avenged his Moussou then!

What had Mira said: “Would you have strangled her with your own hands, Lou?”

Yes, a thousand times, yes! He clenched those hands in sudden frenzy: yes, he would strangle

her—now even. Where was she? He would ask Mira, she must explain it all clearly to him.

A hand was laid upon his shoulder—hers, Mira's hands, gently, almost timidly.

He turned round with a start.

"Stay!" she murmured, with drooping eyes. She was so pale, only her eyelids were reddened; had she been weeping?

With a childlike, helpless movement, she leaned her head against his shoulder.

All was still save for the loud hammering of his heart.

"Ah! Lou—Lou—Lou——"

Through the fierce beating of his heart he heard it, heard his name, like a wail, a plaintive whispered entreaty from her lips.

She slowly rocked her little head, with its half-loosened coils of hair, to and fro against his shoulder. "Ah! Lou—Lou—Lou!"

It seemed to do her good, to relieve her, thus to repeat his name.

His heart stood still, every fibre of his being listened for that beseeching "Lou!" He dared not move a muscle lest it should all melt away like a dream.

A sigh broke from her. "Lou, you are good" she said with a melting quiver in her voice, and

still rocking her head—"you have a good heart, Lou—yes, really a heart. We others—we have everything else, but we have no hearts."

She suddenly started, raised her head, clasped her hands before her face, and with her fingers clutched in her hair, the palms of her hands pressing against her eyeballs, she cried sharply : "Ah ! how ugly, how pitiful, how hollow everything is ! We are puppets, nothing but puppets in our miserable flimsy spangles. Oh, to be really human—nothing more ! If only one might be oneself !"

Her whole frame was shaken by stormy sobs, her hands groped for some support.

Then it was that the strangest, most inconceivable thing happened. . .

She was lying on his breast, her arms clasped convulsively about his neck, wild passionate words breaking through her sobs.

"Lou, I know you will despise me—not to-day, perhaps, but to-morrow—some day—it must come to that ; you will be obliged to despise me, even with such a heart as yours ! But I cannot be different—cannot, cannot, cannot help it ! The whole miserable comedy of life is too strong for us. I cannot help it ! Oh, forgive me !"

As if paralysed by some terrific shock, he stood

there, trembling and bewildered, listening to her wild words.

And listen ; like a blaze of lightning suddenly flashing into the blackness of the night, so one word flooded his heart with glory.

Hark ! “ Lou, I could have loved you—I could love you, some one like you—yourself—I could love——”

Ah, her voice, her sweet, sweet voice !

“ Love.” Oh, he understood that one word ! Had she not taught it him before anything else ?

This time, yes, this time he dared to touch her. Only this once ! Only these few tiny seconds of heavenly human bliss !

He held her close, clasped in his arms. In an agony of frenzied passion he strained her to his heart as if, with the anguished foresight of despair, he knew it could never happen again.

Her slender form seemed crushed in the iron clasp of that passionate embrace. With trembling lips he murmured wild foreign unintelligible words into the masses of her hair, his hot breath swept over her, he felt her shudder.

With a sudden shrill cry she wrenched herself free of his arms and fled.

Had it really happened? Was it a dream ? No, his breast still heaved as if it must burst, his

lips still murmured the accents of his native land.

He remained spell-bound where she left him. When at last he tried to break the spell and walked a few steps, he reeled and nearly fell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SLAVE MARKET.

How the great ocean of stars wavered and billowed—these Paris stars never seemed to keep their places—there was no trusting them ; in Lou's country they stood firmly riveted in the deep sky, like golden nails, to each one of which one might safely fix one's faith and trust and love.

As Lou staggered along the streets of Paris that evening, ever and again through the wild storm of joy which swept over his senses he heard the shrill echo of her words—“Paris faith—Paris love !”

Oh ! that he could grasp his heart tight with bodily hands that it might not break—not to-night—in unspeakable bliss ; not on the morrow, under the burden of the unutterable woe with which that Paris love would crush him.

From that day Mira developed a strange

shyness of Lou, and avoided being alone with him. There were always guests at table now. She was ashamed of having laid bare to him the innermost recesses of her heart ; she was afraid that he would take that madness—that paroxysm—that unaccountable, shuddering horror of her life that had overcome her, as something serious : the simple fellow was positively capable of doing so !

She proceeded to let loose the whole battery of her caprices upon her admirers, her servants—even Lou. Now and then it would seem as if she regretted her generosity and demanded such services of Lou as must inevitably sink him once more to the level of a servant. She would do it even in the presence of guests.

Lou was ever willing to obey her behests. "Lou not gentleman—Lou servant !" It relieved him too from the intolerable strain of playing the gentleman. He was glad to be lowly, to return to the insignificant position in the great human family which belonged to him as a man of colour.

So long as she would suffer him to be near her, if only he might let his pathetic love for her glow and burn in peace, he would be satisfied to live upon the memory of those few short moments of bliss which she had cast like an alms at his feet, as long as time should exist for him.

But sometimes a madness came over him, and he had difficulty in keeping back his jealousy. Cabrera was at the bottom of all her freaks. Something serious was going on between the Count and her. Reports fluttered about the boulevards like wasps. So Count Cabrera was actually capable of wanting to marry this firework of a Mira ! Well, she was not likely to refuse his brilliant name and his castles in Spain—which really existed !

If any of these reports came to her ears she merely laughed—her invariable way of helping herself over every embarrassing situation. “Why not ?” she admitted with her saucy imperious air. “La Comtesse Cabrera . . . Well, gentlemen—and is that a name to be refused when it is politely offered to one ? Madame la Comtesse Cabrera y Calabranca ! Magnificent !—why, in the very name you hear the sweep of the Countess’ train !”

Ah, the thirst—the thirst was too great ! She would not be able to resist it. “Can one change one’s skin ?”

“Fla-Fla” was given for the three hundredth time, and the event was celebrated in the diva’s apartments. She sat surrounded by her devoted admirers, radiant in all the bravery of her bizarre

taste. It was as if all the brightness which flooded the dinner-table emanated from her, as if from the fire of her glances alone the sparkling crystal, the gleaming silver, and all these smiling, laughing faces caught their light. The unfettered masses of her wonderful hair waved over the alabaster whiteness of her firm round throat, her eyes shone in deepest lapis-lazuli blue, her lips glowed like pomegranates. What wonder that Lou should look upon her more than ever as a godlike idol, raised far above this mortal world? He gazed and gazed until her beauty seemed to intoxicate him.

In honour of this festive occasion she had designed something special for Lou; he was to appear among the guests in the picturesque costume of his country. The choosing and arranging of this costume had cost her no little trouble.

"It will suit him a thousand times better than the convict dress of the modern gentleman!" she said.

It was late, and champagne and enthusiasm had raised their spirits to a high pitch. By chance a serious remark was thrown in upon the swirl and rush of conversation: some one spoke of the floods in the districts of the lower Rhone,

what misery they had caused and how little had been done as yet for the houseless inhabitants.

"How would it be to get up an auction for them?" suggested some one.

The idea was hailed with delight and at once put into action. The fat Duc de Mussy, with his rich *gourmet's* voice, must play the part of auctioneer; he might sit down if it got too much for him.

"A hammer, of course we must have a hammer, everything must be quite correct!" cried the Duke very loudly, to try his voice, and puffing out his full round face with an assumption of great importance.

Le beau Fronsacques arrived with the hammer. He had fetched a charming little gold embroidered slipper out of the diva's boudoir: it was the very thing. "Capital—perfect!" came from all sides.

An old gentleman, in whose sharply-pointed face the nose almost touched the chin, could not take his eyes off the dainty little thing. Twinkling and smiling, he turned it round and round in his trembling hand, and tapped it—clipp-clapp—upon the table; his lifeless eyes regaining their animation at the sound.

At first trifles only were bid for. They plun-

dered the mountain of bouquets piled up behind the diva's chair. Then they took the costly lace handkerchief lying beside her on the table, cutting it in pieces that it might fetch a higher price. The pieces went like wild-fire—they stuck them in their button-holes like orders. After this they began to plunder her dress, cutting off the pearl fringes, the ribbons, the lace, and finally boldly attacked the stuff itself.

"Now, then!" cried Mira, laughing, "you will be playing the part of lady's maid a little too naturally presently. Hands off!" and she rapped the boldest pretty smartly on the fingers with her fan. "But now, it is the gentlemen's turn. I bid thirty francs for M. de Fronsacques' left coat-tail!"

It was no use trying to resist ; de Fronsacques was obliged to give in and let them curtail his coat by the desired half.

"Barbarous!" he murmured ; had his great-coat brought, and played the indignant, to the huge delight of the others.

The bids went up when the champagne glass out of which the diva had drunk during the evening was put up for sale. It was knocked down for 130 francs.

"Now the slipper itself," cried sprightly little

Monsieur de Servi from the other end of the table : "fetch the fellow to it ! "

Having got the fellow-slipper from the boudoir, the first went for 450 francs. It was knocked down to the old gentleman—he was supremely happy. He set it on the table in front of him, and watched over his treasures anxiously, lest some one should take it from him.

"The diva's hair ! A hundred francs for a tiny lock !" cried de Servi.

"Lou—a pair of scissors !" cried Mira. "But Baron Wisby shall cut it—nobody else ! "

She was quite sure of the bashful, maidenly Wisby not cutting too much ; besides which she owed him some slight return for his silent, sighing adoration.

It was killing to see Wisby snipping around with the golden scissors—timidly—very carefully—blushing hotter and hotter till the others tittered and laughed.

"Go on—go on !" cried an unsteady voice.

It was as if a magic perfume streamed out upon him from the living silk into which he was privileged to plunge his fingers at will, intoxicating him, till he had difficulty in concealing the nervous tremor of his hands.

The little locks were gone before you could

turn round. A larger one, which Wisby must have cut by mistake, he got such a shock when he saw it, fetched 1100 francs.

"That's enough!" exclaimed Mira after it had been handed over to the enraptured buyer.

"Ah!—she is afraid of thinning it too much!" was the teasing comment from various quarters: her wealth of hair was probably not as real as it looked.

This stung her vanity. Shaking her head violently till the locks lashed round her like serpents, she cried: "Wisby, have the goodness to cut into it properly—cut plenty! Cut as much as you like, do you hear?"

Wisby plucked up courage and cut out a thick, shining, splendid lock. It excited him to such a degree that he dropped his shyness and victoriously outbid the rest. He received the lock for 4300 francs. There was a burst of applause.

"He will set up an altar for it! He will build a shrine for his holy relic!"

They begged Mira to sing one of her Egyptian songs—"My mother has eaten all the dates," or another.

"With pleasure. I will sing for a Napoleon d'or a head," she assented, in the business-like

tone in which she was in the habit of fixing her salary at the theatre.

They were quite agreeable to the arrangement.

"Monsieur Lou ought to collect as it is something from his country," said De Servi. "Monsieur Lou must collect," they cried in chorus.

They handed Lou the slipper, which he took round at the conclusion of the song amidst the shrill bravas! the clinking of glasses, and the "Heavenly!" "Perfect!" of the wine-loosened tongues. Some of them gave more for the sake of the Egyptian costume.

As Lou stood at the other side, just opposite Mira, Cabrera's nervous flushed face leaned over her shoulder. Drawing out his sharp, pointed moustache with outspread fingers he observed, in his supercilious, bored manner :

"Supposing we were to put him up for auction?"
Mira started. "Whom?"

Whom could he mean? He had indicated nobody—not by the faintest sign.

"Why Monsieur Lou of Cairo. What do you say, Mira?"—as calmly as if he were referring to some article on the table.

"Cabrera—are you mad?" she flared out; "have you been drinking?—do you imagine we are in Turkey?

She was so taken by surprise that she could not find words in which to express her indignation adequately.

"We should make a splendid haul," Cabrera continued, as if she had not spoken.

"I will have nothing of the kind," retorted Mira furiously, "the mere suggestion is infamous! Lou is my friend, he has the strongest claims upon my hospitality. What are you thinking of, Cabrera! Try your jokes on somebody else!" and she turned from him with a half-disdainful jerk of her lovely shoulder.

But Cabrera stuck obstinately to his idea, and more than usually excited by the wine, he tried to get the others to back him up;—how thrilling! a bit of slave market in the middle of Paris! They were surely not expected to take the black gentleman seriously any longer. Breteuilles had paid a pretty price for him down in Cairo.

Mira flew into a passion. "You must all have gone raving mad!" She had never been so angry.

A meaning remark upon her friendship with Lou reached her ears; she turned with flaming eyes in the direction from which it came. "Who? What? No—I will not part from him!" she cried in shrill high tones, and with a bold sweep of her fan, embracing the whole circle, she sent the

full measure of her scorn in their faces—"He is worth a thousand times more than all of you put together!"

"Sapristi!" hiccupped a drunken voice.

"I wonder now what he did cost?" drawled Fronsacques.

They would have let the matter drop, fearing a really unpleasant scene.

Then it was that Cabrera leaned towards the diva once more, addressing her in a studiedly careless manner over the shoulder she had turned upon him. At first she pretended not to listen, purposely throwing out a question on some indifferent subject across the table, and breaking in loudly upon his whisper.

But presently something caught her attention ; she listened eagerly, excitedly, her eyes sparkled and flashed out at what he was saying. She dug her little teeth deeper and deeper into her lower lip, the delicate nostrils quivered, an intense burning flush spread over brow and neck, and a look of embarrassment, most unusual to her, rose to her face.

She turned and surveyed the speaker with something very like hatred, and hurled a word at him—sharp and cutting—like an insult.

He dropped his well-bred, measured, almost icy

manner. "Those are my conditions. If you will not make me this concession, if you cannot give up your caprice with regard to your black gentleman—you may keep him, and I will go my way! Mira—enough of these freaks and fancies; I do not like the gossip and the talk they occasion. You owe it to me! I demand it! He or I—nothing less!"

Through the imperious tone of the last words there quivered a touch of real, heartfelt emotion. She had never heard it from him before, she glanced up at him in surprise and met his eyes full. Did he really love her—this *blasé* man of the world? or did he merely want to make her his wife because of the novelty—the unusual character of such a union? Was it possible that his heart should burn for her?—had he been able to save any heart at all out of the whirlpool of life—this Count Cabrera?

She drooped her little head and whispered something. Hot passionate words, which they seemed to wring from one another, flew backwards and forwards between them; now and then some single word or other would break through the whisper with a sudden metallic ring.

The others turned away ostentatiously, but listened nevertheless with their backs, with their

elbows. They winked knowingly at one another.

Cabrera raised his head—raised it high—a glow of triumph lit up his face. He waited awhile and then managed to lead back the conversation to the subject of the slave market.

She could bid too, they said to Mira. This put the matter in a new light to her—so, at least, she persuaded herself. It was a joke, then?—"but a very poor—a very brutal joke!" she exclaimed with a last effort of indignation.

"But consider, Madame, what the joke will bring in!" returned de Servi.

"Well—I've no objection," she assented—all trace of her former spirit gone. But a pang smote her heart, the air of the room seemed to choke her, her bosom rose and fell in deep struggling breaths against the restraining bodice.

Lou had understood nothing of all this. The talk went round of some vague "he" and "him," and they avoided looking at him as if afraid to meet his eye. Alas—all his senses were absorbed in worshipping his idol.

Lou was put up for auction.

The Duc de Mussy roused himself out of his easy position—the article seemed worth the

trouble. He puffed and blew violently, and rapped the table once or twice with the slipper.

"Gentlemen—attention!" he cried in his richest tones, "a perfectly flawless article—warranted genuine! The finest teeth in the world! Extraordinarily tame and very well trained!"

A sardonic laugh burst across the table—they were revenging themselves for having been forced by Mira to put up with the "black gentleman."

"Stop that!" commanded Mira, turning to the Duke, "what's that for?"

"I put him up at three hundred francs!" cried the Duke with business-like composure.

Mira shot up from her chair. "What? Three hundred francs!" she burst out. "Ah—but I must really beg—Duke—it is not a cat or a parrot! What sort of dog would you get for that price! Three thousand francs! *Allons, Messieurs*—three thousand!"

"Three thousand francs for the first!" repeated the Duke instantly.

A drunken voice belonging to the enormous doubled-up form of the banker Goussard inquired sleepily what it was all about. The ever-ready de Servi hastened to intercept the true answer.

"They are bidding for the peacock up there!" he shouted in his ear, and pointed to the stuffed

peacock which spread its magnificent variegated tail on the top of a great cabinet. "Real rubies in the eyes, Monsieur Goussard!"

"Sapristi! Five thousand francs!" he hiccupped, and fixed his eyes from that moment on the peacock in a watery stare.

"Six thousand!" bid somebody directly after.

"Come Messieurs—it is not a horse!" cried Mira indignantly. "Seven thousand!—what am I saying?—Eight thousand!—Eight thousand, Messieurs!"

"Eight thousand for the first!" announced the Duke.

"And five hundred," stammered Goussard, "sha'n't—give—a centime though—if even one—feather's missing."

"Eight thousand five hundred for the first!"

"Ten thousand!" cried Mira as if carried away by the sums.

"Ten thousand for the first!" echoed the Duke.

No further bid; the slipper rapped loudly in the intense listening hush.

"Nobody any more?" puffed the Duke.

The diva let fall a brief remark. "I have no doubt he will be given back to me again, even if I don't bid any more."

"Fifteen thousand francs!" cried a shrill falsetto voice on the instant.

"Fifteen thousand! Wisby has bid fifteen thousand!" exclaimed Fronsacques' grating voice. "I bid sixteen thousand—Duke—sixteen thousand for me."

"He is not worth that," observed a deep bass voice between.

"How—not worth it?" Mira's remark had fired them. It was a question now of making her a present of the Nubian. Cabrera did not join in the bidding. Sixteen thousand—seventeen—eighteen thousand were bid in quick succession.

Lou stood in the background listening to this confused calling out of numbers, his teeth gleaming between his lips, half-open in astonishment, while he shook his head gently—what rare treasure could it be for which they were heaping up such sums!

Goussard beckoned to him with a long outstretched arm. "Bid five hundred more—do you hear?" he breathed heavily into Lou's ear.

Lou grinned and shook his head.

"Will you bid nineteen thousand this minute—you—you—" He could not find the right expression for Lou; the broken voice sounded

menacing, and he shook the Nubian angrily with both hands.

"Nine-teen—thousand," came a whisper no louder than the flutter of a moth's wing.

"Who?—who bid nineteen thousand?" They looked around inquiringly.

Lou looked thoroughly frightened as all eyes turned towards him.

Who? What? Lou? What does it mean?
What nonsense!

They tried to laugh at the good joke which Lou had perpetrated—but the laugh stuck in their throats, they could only titter disconcertedly.

"*Allons*, attention gentlemen," insisted the Duke strained voice, "Eighteen thousand are bid. Who next? Eight-teen thousand for the first!" He simply let Monsieur Lou's nineteen thousand pass unnoticed.

"Twenty thousand!" piped Wisby's little tintinn trumpet voice. His little face glowed a feverish scarlet and his watery-blue eyes flashed like the facettes of a crystal.

"Hold hard, Wisby! Not too fast, little Baron!"—they chaffed him on all sides.

"Twenty thousand for the first——"

Mira sat with a forced stage smile upon her

lips. She had bid no more. She did not dare to glance at Lou.

"Twen-ty thou-sand for the second!" with a rap of the slipper between each syllable.

"Twenty-five thousand," said a voice. The tone was perfectly indifferent as if the sum were not worth mentioning. The Duke did not seem to have heard.

"And twenty thousand for the——"

"Stop," broke in Fronsacques, "twenty-five thousand has been bid."

"By whom?"

"Why—Cabrera!"

There was no sign of either assent or dissent on his immovable face.

"Well—twenty-fife thousand, then," cried the Duke with a shrug. "Twenty-five thousand for the first—"

"Twenty-six thousand!" screamed Wisby desperately.

"He's raving!" they exclaimed.

"Twenty-eight thousand," said Cabrera, rather louder this time, and with a jerk of the head as if to shake off some teasing, buzzing insect.

Even the Duke cast a slightly surprised glance across at Cabrera, and raised the slipper higher than before. "Eight and twenty thousand for

the first!" he said, bringing out each word very slowly and distinctly.

Deep silence.

"Eight and twenty thousand for the second—"

Not a breath stirred.

"And for the third!"

The slipper fell with a hollow resounding stroke upon the table.

Then the babel of voices and laughter broke out. They surrounded Cabrera, clinking glasses and congratulating him. Some of them chaffed him, and Mira tried to join in, but her few shrill attempts at laughter were drowned in the surrounding noise.

"We should not have done it," she said presently, her face clouding darkly.

"Give me air!" she cried in a minute or two. "Why doesn't somebody open the window? It is enough to suffocate one here!"

Lou was still unconscious of the whole affair. But he could not help remarking how some of them kept stealing glances at him—uneasy searching glances—as much as to say—"was he worth twenty-eight thousand francs—this Nubian?"

Why had Mira grown so silent? and why did the laughter of the others die away by degrees

and the conversation languish ; why did they joke no more, nor drink so much wine ?

Once the deep bass voice came rumbling through the oppressive stillness :—“In Cairo—*parbleu*—in Cairo, they cost eight thousand at the outside !”

At the sudden change from boisterous merriment to the gloomy hush of a death-bed room Lou could only shake his head again—“What curious creatures these civilised people are !”

He did not find out for some time. Mira called him to her. She was leaning back in an armchair, her eyes flashing over the edge of her wide-spread fan.

“Lou—you are a good fellow,” she said in her soft liquid tones. The little feathers of her fan fluttered as she waved it lightly to and fro.

Lou stood before her with crossed arms, showing his teeth and wondering what was coming.

“Lou, what were you——what do you think you——”

Why should she hesitate for the right term ?

“Well, Lou—about how much are you worth ? What do you think they would have given for you down in Cairo ?”

Her brow flushed suddenly, but she kept the lower part of her face concealed.

Lou did not know what to say. He remembered the two francs for which he had offered himself at the gate of the country house.

"Lou worth—nothing—Lou fond of Mira—Lou *rien*—" he answered brokenly. There was a pathetic entreaty in his voice.

"But supposing a whole basket full of gold were offered for you, Lou?"

"Mira not let Lou—go——!"

Ah, what honest, trusting, child's eyes he had!

"Twenty-eight thousand francs have been offered for you, Lou—just think what money!" She dropped her eyes, her fan waved agitatedly.

He opened his eyes wide in terror—in amazement.

"Of course it was only a joke, *mon cher*," she continued hurriedly; "the twenty-eight thousand francs are for a lot of unfortunate people whom the water has driven out of house and home. Count Cabrera is going to pay it. There's no must about it—not at all; and he will not wish to keep you—he could not force you here in Paris anyhow. It is only a joke, he will give you back to me—won't you, Count?"

Her voice shook a little.

Cabrera's eyes met hers with the cold gleam of steel. There was a malicious, saturnine look

about the corners of his mouth. Very slowly—in token of refusal, he shook his head from side to side.

"Lou!" cried Mira, horror-stricken.

For a flash of fury passed over the Nubian's face. His eyes blazed in menace, and he pressed his clenched fist wildly against his breast. Only for a few heart-beats—then his head sank, brokenly, low upon his breast, and his arms hung heavy and limp at his sides. No sound came from him.

It was very still in the room, nothing was heard but the faint flutter of Mira's fan.

The tipsy banker began trolling out Mira's song: "My mother has eaten all the dates."

It was ghastly.

Lou raised his head slowly, very slowly, and lifted it high. His whole slender frame seemed to follow—he appeared wonderfully tall. His eyes looked very large and hollow—a mysterious darkness stared from them, giving out no spark of light; but no hatred either and no scorn—not a trace of the menace of the moment before. And yet as they travelled round the circle, resting for a second or so on each face, every eye sank before them. Not one of them dared to look up as long as Lou marked them with that great dumb gaze.

"Preposterous!" murmured one of them, and yet they kept their eyes cast down.

And still the breathless silence remained unbroken.

Suddenly, with an ungainly gesture, Lou turned and went.

No—in the middle of the room he stopped short and once more faced the company. His whole body stiffened, he leaned forward, his head drawn back in the intent attitude of a tiger about to spring upon his prey, the fingers of his slightly raised hands clawing the air. He glared round the circle, seeking him upon whom he should leap, and now—now—he will surely have him by the throat!

No—a low groan broke from him, he straightened himself convulsively—his access of fury had passed.

Drawn to his full height—a pathetic dignity upon his noble face—he walked up to Mira. She was shaking from head to foot, you could hear her fan rattle.

One last look Lou cast at the company. Seeing them sitting there so helpless, paralysed, livid—a faint smile of pity curled the corners of his mouth. Oh—he was not going to hurt Mira—he had no wish to revenge himself upon any of

them ;—no, this was all he meant to do. Bending his knee before Mira, he seized the lace hem of her dress and pressed it to his forehead. It all passed in silence—not a word from his lips.

When they looked up again he was gone—had vanished into thin air.

A general deep breath of relief broke the nightmare that had weighed upon them. It was very embarrassing though afterwards ; they kept nervously to the most ordinary topics of conversation. In between came the chink of the money as the Duke went round collecting what he could get from everybody. Cabrera threw him a cheque for the twenty-eight thousand francs.

“ How glad the poor wretches will be ! ” remarked somebody.

“ A nice evening this has been ! ” said Goussard, with a wavering side glance at the peacock with the “ real ruby eyes.”

No one mentioned Lou, no one inquired what had become of him.

The party broke up very soon. They were ashamed before one another, because they had sat there like beaten hounds under the Nubian’s gaze.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT DARKNESS

THE next morning the people of the house were all talking of the strange moaning and whimpering that had been heard on the stairs about dawn: it was like the wailing of a dying animal.

When Lou left golden Mira's *salon* he could only drag himself away, bowed down with shame and misery, into some remote corner of the house, and crouch there in utter despair.

He had been put up for auction with a few withered flowers, a few rags of lace, a lock or two of hair, and a slipper! She had suffered them to do it—had perhaps made the first suggestion in order to get rid of him. Oh! that she should have chosen such a pitifully degrading way of showing him the door! Why not have taken a whip and beaten him out? Ah! he would have borne it cheerfully from her hand.

But to be sold—bargained for—put up for sale like a senseless paltry thing, among the other trifles—a torn rag with the other rags !

The pale light of dawn drove him from his hiding-place. He began going downstairs step by step—creeping down on all-fours like an animal. A few steps down and then back again, in his helpless misery clasping the marble pillars of the banisters, as if to crush some pity out of the cold stone.

It was very quiet on the staircase ; only his deep sighs breathed eerily through the great empty space, and found an answering echo in every corner. Sometimes a whole ghostly troop of sighs would moan back at him and surround him. He listened for the echoes, starting nervously when they came, and quickening the pace of his creeping. He stole past the mahogany doors on the landings in shuddering fear lest something horrible—a human face—should suddenly peer out at him from one of them.

The first sunbeam pierced the great groups of leaf plants in the staircase windows, the marble banisters glowed rosy red, and the golden bronze of the tall lamp-stands sent out long rays of dazzling light. There was no time to be lost ! Even the sun brought him no friendly greeting,

but only drove him pitilessly away, reminding him that he had no right to any place—no, not even to the smallest, meanest place in the world.

The great door was still locked ; he cowered down beside the banisters and waited. He watched the daylight grow broader and broader, streaming in at the wide windows, flooding every surface, touching every point with a finger of fire.

Oh, this intolerable radiance ! How it weighed upon his panting chest—how it burned his eyes ! He pressed the palms of his hands against his eyeballs to keep it out.

A mysterious longing, such as he had never felt before, took hold upon him. Would that there were some darkness which would swallow up every object, and the false glitter which shone upon it ; if only there were no more sun, and the stars put out their scanty light ; would there were no more day, no human speech, no sound of beast, no laughter and no trembling sigh ; no ticking of the clock nor beat of hearts. Nothing—emptiness—silence—great, unfathomable, eternal darkness !

Many questions came into his mind suggested by that longing. Where was his dead Moussou ? Had dead Moussou found rest in the great darkness ?

Would one sink into that darkness, if one did as dead Moussou had done ?

The creaking of the heavy door, which the porter's boy now opened, roused him from his musings. He got upon his feet at once and forced his slim body through the narrow opening ; the boy looked after him in astonishment : why not have pushed the door open a little wider ?

The pavement outside was flooded with blinding light ; the sun, still low over the horizon, spread its rays down the whole length of the street. He turned his back on the brightness, and followed the long shadow stretching out in front of him. He stepped out quickly, as if hoping thereby soon, very soon, to reach that darkness towards which all his thoughts were tending.

He loitered along the Seine quays, leaning against the parapets to stare into the glistening, rushing water. He stopped at the railings of the bridges, leaned far over and gazed and gazed. Passers-by would come and stand beside him, looking inquisitively, first at him and then at the water, to see what was the matter and what he was doing. He attracted the attention of a municipal Guard, who followed him for an hour from one halting-place to another.

At length he turned his back upon the Seine in

disgust. Ah! he would provide no spectacle for them at that hour. It was a lovely autumn afternoon, the river alive with boats passing up and down stream, and the bridges thronged with moving crowds. It would cause a commotion, that which he meant to do. He had played out his part in the great comedy of civilisation, he had served long enough as a puppet to that demon, advertisement, which tramples with a remorseless smile over new-made graves.

He thought of dead Moussou, of high-souled Farmilli, even of Zeppa : what would they think of his throwing himself over one of the bridges like some desperate erring girl? A crowd would gather, they would fish him out—alive, perhaps ; or as a hideously disfigured corpse dripping with slimy water : he would be taken to the Morgue, where they would exhibit him among a row of criminals to the shuddering curiosity of the populace.

He had a feeling as though that would lead him by a much longer road to the great darkness. No, not like that! Moussou would never have chosen that ugly way.

Again he saw Moussou lying with his white face against the red velvet of the seat, the little chiselled pistol between the curved fingers ; thus,

thus only, should it be done ! It was the last remnant of the vanity of his race, whispering to him that he must go the way of his Moussou, and no other.

He counted the money which Mira was in the habit of giving him that he might "play the gentleman" when they drove out together, and made for the Boulevard Sebastopol. He stopped before a weapon shop, and feasted his eyes with a ghastly longing on the glittering steel of the sabres and the blue gleam of the gun-barrels. The pistols and revolvers stared at him with uncanny hollow eyes, his gaze seemed to press upon the little bright point of the trigger. It needed little more than the pressure of such a glance—and it was done !

He went in. The shopman spread out a selection before him. He asked the prices, which were very high. At last he selected one of small calibre.

"Going to travel ?" asked the man in his polite business tone, but fixing the Nubian sharply at the same time ; the man's grey eyes had blue rings round them like the mouth of a musket.

Lou did not seem to grasp his meaning.

"I mean, you are going on a trip, are you not ?" he inquired again.

Lou grinned and nodded. He paid the money hurriedly, and hastened to get out of the range of those piercing eyes.

It was late in the afternoon when he made his way slowly over the Pont-au-Change. A dirty, red fog hung over the zigzag line of houses which closed the horizon at the bend of the Seine, in which the sun, appearing above it as a great glowing hemisphere, seemed to swim ; you could almost see it rise and fall on the waves of mist, its reflection quivering and dancing on the turbid waters below. The fog sent forth a strange and sultry breath.

The people stood and gazed in wonder at the spectacle. Lou too stood still, in that aimless frame of mind and body which mechanically obeys the slightest impression from without. Suddenly the glowing ball disappeared, engulfed, swallowed up by the unlovely mist, so suddenly as to give the spectators a physical shock. At the same moment, the bank of cloud sailing higher up in the pale sky began to glow, stretching up like an immense, heavily massed pillar of steam. It looked as if this steam rose with audible hissing from out the gulf into which the sun had sunk.

A howl from the roadway made Lou start.

Immediately afterwards the stroke of a whip caught his ear. He winced at the sound, it cut him to the heart.

When he turned to look, his eyes were so dazzled by gazing at the sunset that he could distinguish nothing but a confusion of vehicles.

Another howl! Lou's blood ran cold. He shook his head hastily, trying to clear his eyes of the colours which danced before them, and rubbing them with all his might.

Once more that sound, farther off now, but audible through all the rattle and rumble of wheels. That last was like a cry for help.

It broke the stony spell that bound him. He turned and ran after it, gazing, peering, staring through the blue and green and orange-coloured balls that danced wildly before his eyes, stumbling along heedless of the passers-by.

It was Zeppa's voice!

How could he have recognised it? How catch the fine shade of difference between Zeppa's howl and the howl of other dogs? And yet it was Zeppa's voice. Lou knew it—knew it by the frantic beating of his heart.

At last, as the play of coloured specks grew fainter, he perceived a little cart in which sat a coarse fat man in his shirt-sleeves.

Was not that the purple, bloated face of the butcher of St. Cloud? It shook like a jelly under the jolting of the little cart. The thick lips were drawn in a whistle, the right hand held a stout whip over the back of a great dog, tapping it continuously.

Under the exertion of drawing that cruel load, the bones of the dog's body stood out prominently through the grey-brown skin which hung in folds about him. Dark stripes on the back looked like the weals left by old blows. His head drooped, his tongue hung out, and he panted loudly.

Zeppa's eye!—no, only the ugly hole dug by the lion's claw. Every nerve in Lou leaped at the sight. He trotted along unsteadily beside the cart, his burning eyes fixed upon the dog, his mouth open, but incapable of uttering a sound.

The thoughts darted through his brain in zig-zag flashes. Away with every trace of grudge—away with it at the sight of this shamefully mishandled creature! Away with all thoughts of his own trouble! Let it be once more Lou for his Zeppa! Lou will not forsake Zeppa—not now! And after that—what? All one—whether it be the great darkness or the greater torture of the sunlight: it is all the same to him; just as Zeppa will!

He trots on and on beside the cart, his eyes upon the gasping dog. Zeppa cannot see him. He tries to call his name, but the word cleaves to the roof of his mouth.

It is all so new yet—the surprise of the meeting, his anger at the ill-treatment of the noble animal ; he will, he must, free it from those brutal hands !

But must it be by force ? In that case, they might be parted again as they were at the fair of St. Cloud, where Lou was dragged off to the police-station. He therefore keeps back a little, going against the stream of the foot passengers, who turn round in amazement at him, as he winds in and out among them, half running that he may not lose sight of the cart.

It rattles over the Place St. Michel, making a wide circuit to avoid the stream of carriages coming from the Boulevard of the same name. Here the way is clearer, and Zeppa tries to rest a little, but the butcher's whip will not permit it. At the hoarse threats and curses, and the stinging blows that fall on his back, the animal starts forward again, whining loudly, and protesting with hoarse barks against this brutality.

But the whip is all-powerful, it urges the dog to a last effort, and he drags the cart with a desperate rush across the Place.

Lou follows hard upon them, his fist clenched, choking with rage.

There is the fountain of St. Michel. White and foaming, it pours down in a wide arch from the upper basin, above which rises the figure of the Archangel. A fine cloud of mist hovers above the basin, a puff of wind drives a shower of spray across the pavement.

Ah! how refreshing—what a blessed relief! Zeppa makes straight for the fountain, eager and gasping for a mouthful of cooling water. The butcher pulls and jerks at the reins, trying with furious blows to force the dog in the opposite direction.

A loud snarl comes from the side of the cart, like a sound from a wild beast; a hand clutches fiercely at the butcher's hand.

The butcher lifts his head with a jerk of surprise. There is an exclamation of astonishment: is not this the black thief of St. Cloud, the owner of the dog?

His attempt at a grin dies out before the Nubian's terrific flaming eyes and the grim gnashing of his teeth. What is he going to do? A torrent of mad words hisses from between those teeth, of which the butcher understands not a syllable. He burst into a coarse guffaw, and with

his powerful fist hurls his assailant aside, while one lash of the whip on the dog's back makes the animal plunge away with a wild howl of pain from the side of the fountain where he has been cooling his burning tongue.

The next instant, Lou is on his feet again. He throws himself upon the butcher with clenched fists. Devil ! he will bite his throat through with those sharp fangs of his !

The butcher lifts his whip, reaches far out, and brings it whistling down across the Nubian's face.

Another wild beast snarl wrings itself from Lou's lips ; for one instant he reels, stunned by the blow, then gathers himself up, stands erect—there is a flash of metal in his outstretched hand. Three seconds only—then a shot ; a puff of blue smoke, and two cries like an echo of the shot : one a shrill curse from the butcher's lips, and the other Lou's wild triumphant cry of "Zeppa !" as he falls upon the dog's neck.

In another moment he has freed the dog of the harness, and has made a rush with him across the Place. The crowd hurrying up at the sound of the shot separates in terror before them.

He wants to get across the road, and so reach the Seine quay opposite. But it is not so easy ; he has to pull up before the unbroken stream of

jostling, rattling vehicles coming down from the top of the Boulevard with a rapidity it would be difficult to restrain : a halt that may cost him everything.

Quick—quick ! They are coming to seize him, to tear him from Zeppa !

It must not, shall not, be !

In desperation, he flings himself into the midst of the traffic. He has nearly succeeded in forcing himself through in a zigzag line, when suddenly Zeppa hangs back and lets himself be dragged. Lou pulls him on ; a voice from a height thunders in his ear—the hot breath of horses streams over his face : he staggers, falls ; shrieks and curses all round him ; something monstrous, a gigantic, cumbrous mass bears down upon him ; a noise of rattling, creaking, crunching ; a shrill scream of pain wrung from his own lips, and he is lying with crushed limbs under the wheels of the omnibus. A dull, confused hum of voices around him, hands feeling over his body ; some one gives a loud order—was that not Zeppa's hot breath upon his cheek ?

Then darkness—the great darkness.

CHAPTER XXII.

LOU'S HEAVEN.

THE ward in which Lou lay in bed was very quiet, very light, and very clean. Several other beds stood near, from some of which pale faces looked out with the large absent eyes of sickness. Two Sisters glided busily hither and thither, the stiff wings of their caps rustling faintly, but their footsteps inaudible on the long strips of carpet.

For many days Lou did not know how he came there. In the mists of fever and delirium which obscured his senses, all that he had gone through, now and in the past, concentrated itself to one great fantastic dream. Through this dream-cloud would burst a great zigzag flash of lightning, howling and shrieking weirdly. The terrible lash of Cairo ! They had difficulty in holding him, he writhed and flung himself about so violently under the stinging strokes of that imagined lash.

Only a few days ago it had given him a cut across the face ; the stripe stood out red and swollen over one temple. With the intense smarting of this stripe his recollection of the past events began to return.

One day, as he lay there in a semi-conscious state, another dream came to him ; but this time a beautiful—an unspeakably beautiful dream ! Warm breath played over his face—something whimpered at his side ; now a moist tongue licked his hand. Ah ! Zeppa was there ! Oh joy ! Lou knew then that the dog would desert him no more, he would stay with him to the end.

He dared not open his eyes lest the dream should melt away. A Sister whispered : “*Allons*—good dog ! you must not worry him ! Lie down !”

Lou gave one quick look. He was there ! It was he ! Zeppa’s eyes—no, only the one he had saved from the lion’s den. Zeppa’s polished black nose ! Zeppa’s joyfully wagging tail !

Then all grew dark once more.

He could not understand all the Sister tried to tell him later on. How, barking and howling, the dog had followed the stretcher on which Lou had been brought in, and how he had never left the Hôtel Dieu since. But the rules were very strict, and they dared not let him come inside.

Only quite in secret, at certain hours when the dread superintendence was wont to nod a little, did the Sister venture to let the dog approach the bed. The other patients would hear then, to their astonishment, how the two were carrying on a low conversation ; Lou would whisper tender, loving words to the dog in a language none of them understood ; and Zeppa would give answer in short, plaintive tones that were something more than animal.

At last there came a day when the head surgeon said to the Sister : " Let the dog stay beside him for the little time that remains ; it is all the poor fellow has in the world."

Yes ; he had nothing left but this loving, faithful dog's heart. Even his one treasure, the memory of his dead Moussou, was to be embittered to him.

Lou had pulled out the locket from his amulet bag. Even the gnawing misery of his vagabond days had not succeeded in taking that from him. As he let the golden trinket slip idly through his fingers, it suddenly flew open. A picture dropped out.

He recognised it instantly. Lili's picture ! Mira's picture ! The picture of the woman whom he had loved so deeply, and who had put

him up to auction for twenty-eight thousand francs !

The truth rushed in upon him with horrible blinding clearness. His dead Moussou had loved Mira. Hence her strange distress when the wooden Marquis had shot himself in the puppet play. The woman whom she professed to know so well, was no other than herself. And that "bliss," which had ended by ruining Moussou, had gone on all the time behind his back.

Alas ! alas ! is the whole world but a puppet play ?

And as on that Sunday, when he watched the cascades at St. Cloud, two tears rolled slowly down his cheeks, but hotter, larger, brighter than before. His whole life's sorrow seemed to find its last expression in those two tears.

Strange visitors stood round his bed at times. Keen, sharp, learned faces glared down upon him through weirdly flashing spectacles. Were they going to do anything for him ? He shook his head in silent negation : they need not try to cure him. Was such a life worth living ?

Poor Lou, they neither wished to nor could they cure you. But they were extremely anxious to know whether you belonged to the tribe of the Bischari, or the Ababdah, or the Barabra. They

took measurements of your skull, and they worried you in order to catch a scrap or so of your Nubian dialect; you had even to let them measure the angle of your face with their unfeeling hands.

One of them—an eager, fanatical young scientist—seemed to take a special interest in your handsome head. With the greedy anxiety of an enthusiastic collector who fears to lose a rare curio, he kept his eyes upon "this wonderfully perfect specimen," and came each morning to see if you were still alive.

One of the Sisters had told him about a Heaven where all good people go, and whose joys will make up for all the troubles and trials of this life. He, too, should enter there if he repented him of the deed committed at the fountain. The bullet had missed its mark, it is true; but nevertheless it was a sin upon his conscience.

A last faint spark of anger flashed from Lou's dim eyes.

The Sister shook her head admonishly. "We must forgive, that we may be forgiven. No repentance, no Heaven, my friend!"

Ah! he was so weak, and the Sister's voice had such a heartfelt tone—it was so new to him. Like a gentle, kindly hand it seemed to sweep

away all thoughts of hatred from his mind. A plaintive smile passed over his sunken features.

"Lou not worth," he sighed ; "Lou not worth Heaven ; Heaven white, Lou not white."

As the end drew near, the Sister sat at his bedside. The dog had buried his nose deep in the coverlet, and gazed fixedly with his one faithful eye into Lou's face.

The Sister began to pray. "Our Father, which art in Heaven——"

Only a few mutilated words came from the dying man.

"Hallowed be Thy name——"

His lips worked mechanically, he tried to repeat it ; but the words had little resemblance to the real ones.

"Thy kingdom come," continued the Sister.

The lips stopped short in their efforts. "Thy kingdom come—can't you hear, Lou ?"

Lou was silent.

Suddenly he stammered out—louder, more distinctly : "Which art in Heaven——"

"Yes, Lou, yes ;" the Sister urged gently ; "go on : Thy kingdom come——"

He slowly turned his heavy head from side to side on the pillow. He was evidently trying hard to speak. The Sister listened attentively.

Gathering his thoughts together with one last effort of will, he let the words drop syllable by syllable.

"Lou not want Heaven—where—Lili is—Lou not—want Heaven—where any people—people not good—Lou want Heaven—where Zeppa go—Zeppa Heaven—good Heaven!"

"Holy Mother of God!" cried the Sister, starting to her feet in horror.

When they came to him next morning he was dead—his face turned towards Zeppa. They had difficulty in unclasping the stiffened fingers from the dog's collar. A ray of golden sunshine streamed across the bed, and conjured up the semblance of a smile upon the quiet features of the dead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOU'S HONOURS.

A FEW months later the administration of the Hôtel Dieu received a considerable sum of money, with directions that it was to be used in erecting a monument upon the grave of a Nubian, named Lou, who had died in the hospital in the preceding October. It was to be of marble, something princely, magnificent ; no expense was to be spared. The document bore a Spanish postmark, and was signed in a clear but slightly trembling hand : Mira, Countess Cabrera.

There was universal astonishment at the office. Aha ! the spoilt *diva* wants to bring herself into notice again ! She fancies herself forgotten in the splendour of her coronet ! One of the officials knew better. This monument represented the weight that sat upon her conscience like a nightmare : she hoped thus to free herself of it—it threatened to crush her.

The little man recalled the circumstances. On the day after the Nubian's death, a lady dressed in black, and with all the airs of a tragedy queen, came sweeping into the bureau ; through the crape veil, which completely covered her head, you could see the gleam of golden hair.

Her voice shook a little as she explained her mission. "May I be permitted to see the body ?"

"Which body, Madame ?" Through the official's smiling politeness towards a lady broke a tone of annoyance at such a question ; as if there was not more than one body in a great hospital like that !

"It was in the *Figaro*, Monsieur," explained the lady ; she was going to say something more, but a sudden feeling of shame seemed to cut her short.

She had read it in the *Figaro* ! Among the coarse gossip of the Boulevards, the highly spiced *double-entends* and the rich baits of the matrimonial advertisements, she had read that a certain Nubian who had fired off a pistol near the Fontaine St. Michel had just died in the Hôtel Dieu.

The official, though well-accustomed to the hardly restrained tears and broken sighs of visitors, was startled by the strange tremor in her voice : "It is a black—his name is Lou."

The man shrugged his shoulders with his polite

smile again, and stuck his pen behind his ear.
“Very sorry, Madame, but you are too late ; you should have come sooner.”

“Is he buried already ?” she murmured almost inaudibly.

“Hm, not that,” answered the official ; and there was something ghastly in the fact that while he spoke he forgot to drop his professional smile.
“Not that, Madame, but you know the conditions of being received into the Hôtel Dieu ; nobody came to claim him : these scientific gentlemen are so eager in their thirst for knowledge, particularly in the case of this Nubian”

The lady was seized with shuddering horror and rushed away. The official saw her dart across the square in front of Notre Dame, after sending away her carriage with a wild, convulsive gesture. A fine drizzle was coming down from the grey sky, but she disdained the protection of an umbrella ; her dress rustled loudly over the wet black pavement.

Then she disappeared into the yawning darkness of the portico of Notre Dame.

The Renaissance Theatre was thrown into utter consternation that night. Golden Mira had sent word that she was ill. It was rumoured that she meant to leave the stage altogether. All

kinds of reports flew about the Boulevards. Mira was going into a nunnery—no, she was going to marry Count Cabrera immediately.

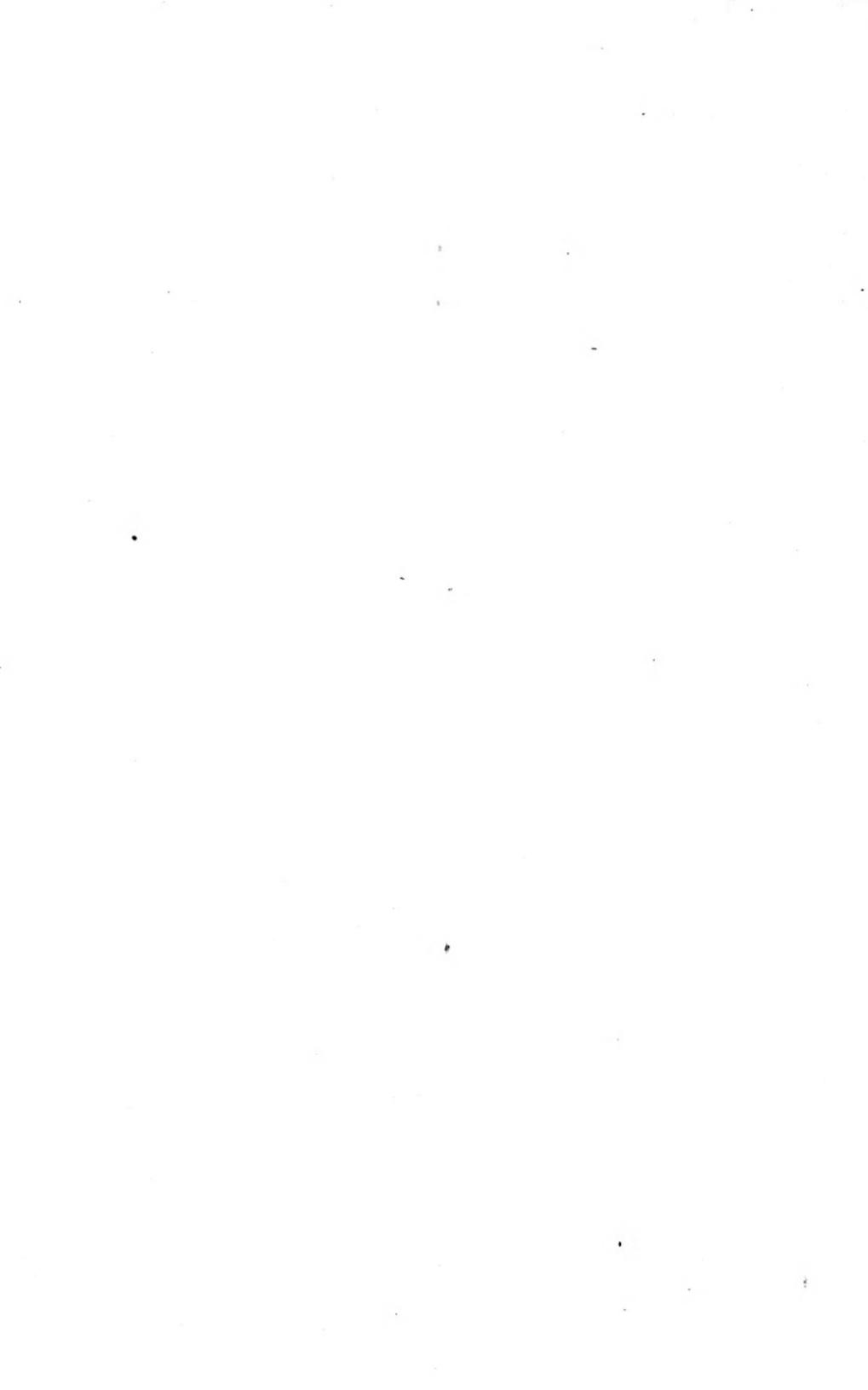
The Countess's orders were carried out at once in that part of the churchyard of Mont Parnasse reserved for the Hôtel Dieu. A marble monument arose above the Nubian's grave. A slight dilemma was occasioned, however, by the fact that there was no room for the broad pediment between the poor little crosses of the hospital, and they had to move some of them further off.

The monument was a masterpiece of pomp and grandeur, and the pride of the artist who executed it ; it did him eminent service as an advertisement, and brought him in a number of other orders. It was admired by all visitors to the churchyard, and recommended to strangers as a sight worth seeing. They were amazed by it. What princely dignitary or what great celebrity lay buried here ? But there was nothing to tell them but the great, laconic, glittering gold "Lou" on the white marble ; nothing but the star against it in the guide-book to distinguish it above other monuments.

It stood in such a warm sunny spot, that often on mild spring afternoons it would happen that the roving taste of the nurses led them to

come thus far. Then the monument would be surrounded by the gay voices of children, and some of the little lips would spell out the solitary inscription L—O—U,—only three letters ; and their laughter would flutter, bird-like, into the air with delight at having conquered the stupendous difficulty of those three letters.

Thus, poor Lou, did they remember thee in death !



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